

Eastlands Dreaming

A Novel about the Little Wonderland that may
Save many more Lives...

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Epilogue

This book is a story. However, it is much more than just that. It is the first in a series of books that will explore the concept of a lifestyle. That of people who get involved in culture, and help make it, rather than just sit and watch it. That where people are able to be understanding of

each other, helped by the fact that people of all types are able to be heard more. That of people who use their ideas and goodwill to bond as friends. That where people can come together and dream of a better world rather than just be fixated on present troubles. That of the big family made up of both genetic and non-genetic links and people caring for each other. That where you do not have to worry about being alone, where family is a birthright that cannot be taken away by things like divorce, isolation, fallout or infertility.

Of course, where this is going to happen, the place itself and the system that runs it has to be different from what we are used to right now. In that place the people need to be given a voice and there must be more understanding and less hate between individuals. That's why I have created Eastlands, one ideal place for people who want to live the aforementioned lifestyle. Eastlands has not yet been built in the modern world, but it can be – especially in the era of cyberspace and advanced communication technology.

Apple is the Princess of Eastlands, espousing the ideals of this life and using it to make the best change in life she can. She has always lived by this ideal but will find out more about this later. This book is both fantasy and reality, and shifts rapidly between the two, just like Apple's own mind. Some parts are based completely around a real life setting, while others will have a bit more fantasy in it. We want to portray what Apple actually sees, not what happens on the surface, and we believe that portraying the fantasy is the best way to do so sometimes. Here we are actually letting you experience things in the same intensity as Apple herself experienced them. As to what is physical reality and what is fantasy, and what you should make of the fantasy..... well, for a complete, real, personal experience, we let you decide. So if you are ready, let's begin.....

Epilogue – Who is Apple?

This book is all about Apple, the Princess of Eastlands and her friends, and a certain place called Eastlands. Who's Apple? First, we shall start with the name, assuming that you would not know much about her yet, seeing that you are probably not from Eastlands. Apple's was 19 years old at the start of the story we are about to tell.

Apple lives in Eastlands, a relatively small community that is closely knit. It is about thirty minutes away from the big city Saunivdow, a city of five or six million people. This description may make you think of Eastlands as a typical small village-town, but in fact it has a unique history, culture and set of institutions that makes it far from typical, as you will see. In fact, Eastlands is so different that every day, when Apple travels out into the city to go to college and travels back home on a train, she is in fact moving through two different worlds. She also has a residence out there in the city, for times when it is not convenient to come back, and she indeed feels like she lives in two different worlds.

Apple has close friends both inside and outside Eastlands, and is well tuned to both lifestyles. Those inside Eastlands share her culture, while those outside find it refreshing (not everyone likes Eastlands, but those who stick around with her as friends tend to like it). That is probably one reason why they enjoy coming to the Apple Complex, what they call Apple's city residence. Apple's title both inside and outside Eastlands is the Princess of Eastlands, something she is proud of. This was a title given to her by her friends, and she is very proud of. She was eleven at that time and she and her friends decided that they should all be known to stand for something, they all had to be the Princess or Prince of something. They all decided that Apple, due to her frequent involvement in organising tours for people visiting Eastlands, and her insistence that the tourists be shown the Eastlands way of life rather than just the town sights, should be the Princess of Eastlands. Apple firmly believes in the Eastlands way of life – creating culture and building family is the big activity of life, and everything else,

including what to buy and how to arrange living spaces, should be all based around the two activities.

The biggest thing in Apple's life is probably her broadcast. You will start to appreciate why when you know what the broadcast is to her. For to her, the broadcast was not just a show - she puts what she thinks, hopes and plans, as well as her artistic talent and huge parts of her everyday creative produce, into the show. Therefore, the show is rather like the essence of her, packaged in a form that can be communicated to everybody.

The idea of creating a broadcast, in fact creating anything, didn't pop into her head until she was 13, when she started to think a lot about things and developed her style and schemes and put it into different areas. For the last few years she began working furiously on it. Now, nearly 20 years old, the broadcast is widely received in Eastlands and its related areas, and she has a few audiences outside.

The broadcast is not in a typical format aimed

for Tabloid Success - when she was younger she would have thought of that, and had she gone down that path she might have become a typical 'young hot thing' like Daisy Dreams, who is about as old as Apple and is all over the city at the moment with her 'hip fashion sense on everything'. The way Apple does it is to include elements that really come from what she is thinking, things that she really want to share with her audience, and also throw in a few ideas that may improve living for everyone. This may not go down well with those who are so fed on what's considered to be fashionable out there, but she is confident that with appropriate communication the audience can be built up.

In Eastlands, because of The Broadcast in the past one or two years (it is relatively easy to get what you have to say across in Eastlands as you will see, and if you have something good to say you would be rewarded with a fair audience), the name Apple has become quite big recently and her appearance incites a bit of awe. Apple thinks that both ways have its advantages and disadvantages. You will see

how that thought develops throughout the story.

When we talk about Princess you may think of glamour. But the fact is that Apple looks very down to earth, and she likes her style. She thinks the world is a beautiful place and therefore dresses in beautiful warm colours, but she would never want to 'flaunt it', as the big city people often say. The fact that she does not have time or puts thought into looking like a 'young hot thing' means that people outside Eastlands see her more like a not particularly stylish girl. However, to those in Eastlands, it is the culture that a person creates that defines them, not how they look.

Though the broadcast is like a lifeline to Apple, it is her friends that really provide the comfort in her life. It is those gatherings at the Apple complex that recharge her again and again, and it is her friends that keep her sane in the sometimes insane world that is Saunivdow City. It wasn't until the past year that she started to really realise this, but since then she has been

doubling up her effort to treat her friends well.

Overall, Apple thinks she has quite a good everyday life, one that is creative, warm, and not entirely routine. It wasn't always like this for her, and especially when looking back to the past, which she does quite a lot during her frequent reflections, she can indeed say that she is happy.

Chapter 1 - The Rumour of Axerule

Today, like most weekdays, Apple was in the city, attending lessons at the university. She would only be there until the early afternoon on this day, since the lessons ended early.

Normally she may spend a bit of time around the city, visiting her usual spots, and she may even see her friends in her Saunivdow residence.

But today she is doing none of that, since she had something much more important to do.

She had to rush home to prepare for a family gathering. You see, family gatherings are large events in Eastlands. It is not just your genetic family that attends either. Family includes all types of loyal relationships, like ceremonial siblings and social parents too.

By 2:30pm she was on the bus that took her from the university to Saunivdow South station, and from there she would take the quickest route back to Eastlands.

"Hey Apple," a boy tapped her shoulder from behind. Apple turned around and saw Ralph, one of the bunch of friends that often gather at her Saunivdow residence.

"Hey Ralph! How are you doing?" Apple greeted him.

"I'm okay," Ralph replied, lazily.

"What are you doing here?" she asked him.

"I was at the Saunivdow Action Group meeting in the uni," he replied. "Now I'm going home. How about you?"

Like all residents of Eastlands Apple was is socially well-informed, and very eager to get

the injustices of the world fixed. In Eastlands she puts her ideas out not just about everyday life and Eastlands itself, but also about how everyone can do their bit for the rest of the world, the world that is suffering every day. One of the most disturbing things she finds about the world outside Eastlands is the injustice and suffering minority groups often suffer. Why can't we just live together, she would often ask. Since the start of university two years ago, she has become involved in groups that seek to improve the lives of misunderstood minorities and end the injustices that surround them.

Today the Saunivdow Action Group was going to march to the consulates of countries which officially sanctioned racism and homophobia in their laws, and to protest at each of them and demand an end to the injustice immediately. This was just the thing that would turn Apple on, and she in fact wrote many of the letters that were to be handed over to the consulate representatives. However, today was going to be an important gathering and she couldn't miss it. There was always going to be a

time for protests, she thought.

"I'm going home to prepare for a family event," said Apple. "I am really sorry for missing the protests today, but next time I will definitely go. Good luck with your important work this afternoon. Anyway, is there anything special going on in your life?"

"Not really," he replied. "Have you heard of the Axerule Organisation?"

"No, why? That sounds like a horrible name," she said.

"It is indeed unpleasant. It was one of the things our group talked about today. Axerule Org is a 110 year old organisation. It was created by a depressed guy, or an alien, or a strange creature, depending on who you believe, who decided that enjoyable life is decadent, and happiness-orientated philosophy is toxic.

Therefore he started this cult where members had to follow their absurd philosophy and lifestyle strictly, and were not allowed to be free to pursue anything, and they essentially live like robots. It's called Axerule because they thought

the ideal world was one where the axe ruled everything, i.e. might is right. They go via occult means to try to bring down the happiness of this world, like publishing articles using anonymous titles that try to divide previously happy organisations, using their vast sources of finance to distort what becomes popular out there, and the like," said Ralph.

"Really sounds like it's crazy. It wouldn't be big though?" Apple asked.

"Depends on who you believe again. Some believe that it had died out, while others think they are all around us. The fact that they keep a code of silence, use aliases when in action etc. really makes them hard to catch. They are usually avoidant towards happy activities, but this may not even be always true, since they would be happy to join any activity to further their cause," said Ralph.

"But why would people keep joining?" asked Apple.

"Well, once a family's in, they're in. Families originally were persuaded to join to get themselves out of debt, many decades ago, and today they're all in, including their

children," said Ralph.

"Sounds really horrible," said Apple, now almost deep in thought.

"I believe there's some truth to it. Anyway, here's my stop. See you on Friday at the Complex."

"I don't think it's anything really, but....see you there," Apple shouted back just in time, managing to squeeze a bit of herself out of that deep net of thought that was now building around her. encircling her.

Apple's friends, being the investigative and sometimes activist type, often came up with stories like these. Ninety percent of the time they were just bogus, and the other ten percent were overblown out of proportion.

Apple has learnt not to be very disturbed about things like this, but still, whenever her ears hear horrible things like this, it must be resolved, in the same way that when you eat and breathe toxins into your body, your body must process it and get rid of it in some way.

In the spirit of 'clearing things up', that night when Apple got home, she searched the

internet for information on Axerule. Most of what she found was just like what Ralph had told her. It all looked quite unreal, and she was indeed 95% sure that it was all fake. Nothing more to investigate, just a conspiracy theory, thought Apple. But just as she was about to shut the computer down for the day, she found this: ".....It seems like I am going to be stuck in this place forever, never reaching what I want to be. The people around me say that's life, but I don't really want to give up. Please contact me if you can help. Please....."

This discussion was originally from an internet discussion group that was for general discussion, and was dated about half a year ago. It wasn't even a full message, and wasn't suggestive of Axerule, but somehow Apple found it on a website about Axerule. Unfortunately, the site was now broken. It didn't help either that what she got was not a proper transcript, not even a proper screenshot - it was a photo of a monitor screen displaying the discussion. She could, however, barely make out that the girl's name was Rochelle, she lived in Southlands, Saunivdow, and also her email address.

Apple really didn't believe in Axerule, but here is a human being in distress, and she thought it would be good to get to know anyone in one of her area who is in trouble and doesn't sound like a street hardened cheat. There was actually no way to tell if she was a cheat, but somehow Apple didn't feel this way. Perhaps her romantic heart was playing up again? Last time she almost went and dated a boy who turned out to be a hardened crack dealer. She hoped to her self quietly that she had grown smarter since that near blow. Anyway, she decided to send the girl a message.

"Hi Rochelle,
How are you going? I am a local of Southlakes and I have read about you in a message forum. I am looking for friends, and I believe we Southlanders should come together to make friends. If you are interested, please reply and tell me more about you.
Yours sincerely,
Apple."

There were actually two email addresses on the image, and she couldn't quite make out which one belonged to Rochelle, so she just sent the message to both addresses. She didn't want to be specific about her question this time because she wasn't sure if Rochelle was still in the mood to deal with that. Better make friends first, she thought.

The next day in the college Apple and Ralph had a chance to talk somewhere quiet. Apple decided to bring up what she found.

"Look what I found on the net yesterday," she said, handing Ralph the printouts.

Ralph studied them carefully.

"A classic sign of the curse," he said solemnly.

"No, that proves nothing," said Apple, trying to be intelligent. "It could all be a hoax, or paranoid minds putting the wrong dots together. "But I've decided that someone near us needs some help and cheering up, so I tried to email the girl yesterday. You know, I am all for helping those who can't find a way to their dreams."

"I think that'll be helpful," said Ralph. At least

Apple was not wasting time on gathering the link. But more will need to be done?

"How about we don't argue now, and try to investigate things together? It seems that we have enough common interest to pursue here," suggested Apple. "And don't mess things up in front of our group."

"Okay, we're in this together" said Ralph. He 'knew' that Axerule was real, but a smart investigator doesn't unnecessarily upset their strategic partners. He also would have really wanted to involve the group, but that can wait a little. "So what else do you want to do?"

"We have to have a nice place to take Rochelle to cheer her up and to make friends with her, before we can go in to help her" said Apple. "I want, at least, the people at my gathering ready to receive her with open arms."

Ralph really beamed at Apple's willingness to go far on this. She was normally quite dismissive of doubtful theories as she always thought she had 'more important things to deal with'. A preliminary decision from her to involve the

group was, at least, a good thing in any case. Ralph's enthusiasm was for a different reason than Apple's though. Whereas she was looking to help a possible friend, he couldn't care less about Rochelle. His thoughts were all about the getting into the Axerule problem. He had read that a nice place with an entirely opposite way of life would be ideal to break the grip of the Axerule curse. Apple had always said that the best medicine for delusion is a nice time, and she would probably have quite a good idea of how to approach a mission of this style. To do that successfully, however, he believed he would have to suggest something bigger, and different, and more like the antithesis to the Axerule curse, than just the group gathering.

"How about Eastlands?" asked Ralph. He had not seen Eastlands before, but trusting Apple's descriptions of it, and seeing the person that Apple was, he thought this may be a good choice. "I've never been there, but she may like it."

Apple kind of agreed. But she would need an outside tour guide too - it was quite agreed

that only an outsider can talk to and outsider about some things in Eastlands and make them understand.

"Perhaps you should go first? Anytime this week?" offered Apple. "I'll be your guide."

"I really like to do this. But then, I don't have the time. I have a lot of engagements this month," said Ralph, a bit sunken. He was actually a bit afraid to go anywhere one on one with a girl he hadn't met before, something that he thought would be quite inevitable at some stage if Apple left him the mission of being the tour guide.

"So what other ideas do you have?" offered Apple.

Ralph was happy that Apple didn't probe further. But he must be careful now, for he knew if the real cause came out, Apple wouldn't let him off the hook, since she believed that 'everything is all right' in Eastlands and that those who are still afraid should really try it. He thought for a while.

"How about sending in our expert tour guide Cheryl? I'm sure she'll like it. She likes going

places on holidays, and building good tours of them. We have a long weekend coming up, and maybe she can use that?" suggested Ralph.

Apple thought about it.

"Sure, sounds like a good idea," she said. "How about you talk to her about this first, and maybe you can encourage her to ask me about it in our next gathering?"

"Sounds fine," he said. "I'll do it as soon as possible."

Apple walked away satisfied, thinking that at least one of her team seemed keen to accept the new friend, and had promised not to mess things up, at least for now. Ralph also walked away fulfilled. He had just made a big step towards a potentially big discovery, he thought.

For Apple, though she didn't believe in the whole Axerule phenomenon, perhaps the Axerule thing was having an effect on her, an effect that can't be explained by her concerns for Rochelle alone. In any case, her concerns for Rochelle were indeed quite exaggerated

after all. Maybe the Axerule curse was now near Saunivdow, and her subconscious mind was sensing it and desperate to fight it? In the eyes of her friends she was almost a cold, brave decision maker, but inside she is actually a paranoid type of person. Perhaps it's just that subconsciously she was starting to believe in the hype and getting a bit desperate? No, not really. She knew that Axerule was fake, but somewhere underneath she was guessing that there was something underneath, something more. Maybe it is not about Axerule itself but just the thought that somebody could end up in a situation like Rochelle's? Being quite the idealistic type, every time that she is reminded of despair, hopelessness, helpless acceptance and sorrow, it has always been uncomfortable for her. It is quite a usual event for her to be triggered by little bits of news, like breathing in particles in the environment, into deep thoughts, and finally into some action - any action she could do to solve the discomfort. Now she was in the action mode, she thought, and she was going to make the most of it. Apple's life wasn't one of rebellion usually, but

ideas of hopelessness and acceptance of bad deals, and the meaningless fights of the world were two things which got her into her warrior mode.

It was for this very characteristic of Apple's personality that he had come to her for this 'important matter' of his. Wouldn't the enemy of hopeless acceptance, who would be prepared to do something about it any day, and whose thoughts were totally against it, be the best one to fight the Axerule? Ralph actually had read that Axerule was now everywhere, and they are using all sorts of ways to broadcast their curse all over public places so everyone would get it too. Of course he didn't dare share it with Apple. If he did so, it would have been the end of their cooperation. He had read that the curse had now 70% infiltrated Saunivdow, but as long as there is someone who is totally sane they could potentially save those around them, just by using the right persuasion, and eventually, by domino effect, they would be able to save everyone, and kick the curse out. But getting

her worked up a bit was good enough - she would turn on her ideal campaigner mode and maybe save at least a few around her from the curse. He may even need that happy streak in her to protect him from the curse one day, so it was high time that she started practising her campaign, even if her actions weren't likely to be significant enough to start the domino against the curse. And if there was anyone he knew that would definitely be able to withstand the curse and would have a good shot at saving their friends from it,

Apple was also actually the main reason in Ralph's mind for choosing Eastlands for the girl. By doing so, he could get the girl to make friends with Apple. Apple had a gift for talking about problems with friends and finding a way for her client to spell it out, a gift that would be important for uncovering a curse. And maybe the girl could even participate in some of those activities she does. You only had to see one day of Apple's life to catch the feeling that everything around you is potentially magical, and something big is about to happen that will turn the wind of hopelessness on its head. It full

of activities and thoughts to do with hopes and dreams, the little antidote for the Axerule despair and monotony, and the perfect antidote to the thing this girl was suffering from. Going through her multiple real and imaginary worlds, action plans almost every week, gatherings with multiple groups of friends, and the like, her thoughts would certainly be thrown out of their usual box, which was believed to be the first step to releasing and breaking the Axerule curse according to what he had read.

Chapter 2 - Apple's Day of Action

Last night Apple had a strange dream, but she couldn't clearly remember it now. Ralph's words, the stupid Axerule hype, and even Rochelle - they were now quite distant from Apple, whose thoughts was just to get through her morning motions at this moment. But, as with all issues she deals with, some time during the breakfast she would get back to it.

It was now seven in the morning on Wednesday morning. Apple was in the bathroom, preparing for the day as she was washing her face. This was the time when her mind would gradually adapt from being semi-asleep to being in gear for the day's work.

At 7:05 she sat down at table to breakfast. It was just what she eats usually, oats and a sandwich. She did so while the sound of the morning breakfast show roared on in the lounge room, as her mother prepared for the day ahead in the house. By 7:15 Apple had finished eating and five minutes later she was all changed.

Today, just like most weekdays, Apple was going to travel into the city, and she would not return until midday tomorrow. At 7:25am she bid farewell to her mother for the day.

"Take care, and enjoy the day," her mother said, "and remember that I love you a lot."

"Have a good day," she returned the greeting. She did in fact love her mother quite a lot - but most of the time she couldn't show it enough, she thought.

Today was action day. In fact it was double action day: first, she vowed that she would try to make everyone happy and hopeful. She initiated such actions for herself every time she found herself a bit down. Second, she was going to look out for Rochelle, who may even have replied already, and get the latest over to Ralph so they can prepare a warm welcoming. In her diary the two actions would be written up as two storms, each with a name and a track. This is how serious she takes her action days.

She stepped into the chilly street, which was quiet except for the roaring of cars transmitted from faraway highways, which had become whispers by the time they reached Apple's ears. The houses all around her looked quite sleepy - although in fact in quite a number of them people were busily preparing for the day ahead, the cold and the mist just made everything looked asleep. Apple really doesn't like the winter too much. A minute later Apple turned onto the main road, where there were a strip of shops. It was still before trading hours, so the strip was mainly quiet. She strolled quickly

past them to the local suburban railway station, Heyson Station, as she heard some far away calls of "Apple, Apple, come over here,....." "I love them but no time for them now," she thought, "I will treat them well when I come back tomorrow afternoon." The train had just arrived at platform 1 at Heyson station when she got there. Gratefully, she jumped aboard, and took one of the few seats left.

Within five minutes she was at Eastlands Central, where she would have to change for the intercity express which would take her to Saunivdow. As she stepped out onto the underground platform six at Eastlands Station, little crowds of schoolgirls on their way to school was already waiting for her. Some just wanted to ask her about things (as they have grown to like her quite a lot lately), while others had autographs for her to sign. As she had no time for all of them really, but nevertheless didn't want to disappoint them (especially today), she gave them little flyers saying that she would have a party at Eastlands Central Community Hall tomorrow afternoon, and that all are

welcome. Anywhere else this wouldn't have worked for anyone who was being sought after by crowds, but in the game of life in Eastlands, the rules are different. Within twenty seconds Apple had pounded up the escalator for platform six, was now dashing across the concourse, and has the escalator to platform one in her eyes. In another minute she was pushing through hectic crowds on platform one, where everyone was going to the city for one purpose or another, for grand reasons and reasons not so grand. In yet another one she would be sitting on the 7:46 express, which would have just pulled out of the station.

Thirty minutes later the 7:46 express from Eastlands had arrived in the city centre. She found herself repeating the everyday process of pounding towards the escalator, pounding all the way up it, and rushing across to the ticket gates. Within another minute she was out there in the city square. The city square was a flurry of people all rushing to work, as was usual for any weekday morning at 8am. Apple was just one of those who were trying to make out

her own way among this mass of shooting stars, hoping to get to the bus stop for the college in time. When she was young she had always imagined making her way through the streets as traveling on a road or a train track, with the person next to her in the other lane or in the next track. She still does it sometimes, and more often subconsciously. At this time of the day she ways an express train, trying to overtake some of the regular services using an express track. She sped past the ice-cream stall, the newsagency, the souvenir store 'station', the little cafe 'station', and the park 'station', and finally made a stop at the bus rank. At the entrance to the bus ranks, piles of other 'trains' were also stopping. Heaps of Number 219s were lining up, but it was still not enough to relief the queue much.

A team of people were offering the City!Today Mag as usual. As usual, Apple took one, and hurried off to join the quickly building queue. Apple is probably not as big on gossip as some other girls, as she believes that it doesn't really tell the whole story, nor does it tell the best or

most important stories. However, she wants to know what is going on in the world and interact with it. She believes communication rests on news and events, and news that you can relate and apply to everyday life is mostly not what comes out of the newspaper. In the queue, she opened the mag and started to read it. The cover girl for this issue was Daisy Dreams, as she was now big all over the world. Daisy was well natured and happy - just the kind of thing a sometimes sorry looking world needs, and a good role model for young girls, thought Apple. Daisy was the kind of girl Apple would have wanted to become when she was younger, and although through her journeys, reflections and discoveries she had turned out quite differently, she still used the same basic template of positivity she was certain she shared with Daisy in her everyday life even now. In fact, Apple was usually happy when she talked about Daisy in her own broadcast. Everyone went on and on about how capable a youngster she was. Apple totally agreed - it's not every day that a youngster with a whole business empire, spreading positive messages

every day is born.

But then a darker thought touched Apple. This happens every time there are reports about a mega-rich whiz kid who has turned out to dominate culture. The sad thing that touches Apple is that it is not every day that there is a chance for such youngsters. Daisy must have been in the right place at the right time to have been offered a chance to do all that she is doing, not to mention having extra good looks that had turned a lot of everyday girls jealous, and parents who were also famous entertainers.

Her thoughts turned briefly to jealousy, and why it happens. She reasoned that for people who lived entirely in a place like Saunivdow, seeing people get places in life every day while not knowing how to get a better deal for oneself is indeed quite a bitter life to have. For most of the rest of the world, Saunivdow included, is not like in Eastlands where everybody is born with a birthright to a family they will not fallout with, the knowledge that there will always be people around them to help them and care for them,

and the chance to help create and change the world around them if they try to come up with something good. No, life in this world is usually much more harsh and helpless. Here, for every person who receives a deal in life Daisy's, where you could supposedly do your thing and earn the admiration of millions and have enough money to keep you feeling secure for the rest of your days (note that while security in Eastlands meant family, here it meant money as family isn't guaranteed even for the supposedly lucky ones), many more receive unfair deals, and end up doubting themselves, giving up on any dreams, and turn into cynical streetsters. It is not that the general young population, whom the middle-aged generation often decry as lazy and unthoughtful, are necessarily so. We cannot accept that. More needs to be done. And more can be done. Yes, that was what Apple would always think.

Soon it was 3pm, and the day itself ran just as

usual, and it went past in a rush. She could vaguely remember trying to treat her friends a bit better today, and trying to counsel one into shooting for her goals. That was satisfying, she thought.

Right now Apple was again in a bus rank. A 219 came, and most of the people in the rank jumped aboard. This was what Apple would do too usually, but since she had to be somewhere in the city this evening to attend a drama production put up by some of her friends, she would be staying in the city overnight and would have no need to hurry. She would also be meeting Ralph in her city home, and hopefully by then she would have had a chance to check her email, hopefully in Southlakes Wonderland on the way home, and tell Ralph the latest. Not that she wanted to up the Axerule hype - she just wanted Ralph to help out in the preparation for the welcoming. She took the 600 to Southlands which came behind the 219. The 600 drove through the community around the college. Apple took the 600 whenever she wasn't in a hurry. She liked to

look at the pretty communities and dream of being in romantic, faraway places, and the airport that was part of the 600 route also helped with the dreaming. "We fly hours to look at everyday places in other parts of the world, yet condemn those an hour from us as depressing, meaningless, and opportunityless. How can that be?" she thought. Taking a one hour holiday would also be the antidote to the things that have been troubling her mind lately. She couldn't tell what trouble it was precisely, but it was probably many of those Axerule typed things. Maybe she wasn't so sure that was nothing after all? To enjoy the holiday now though, she would have to put everything out of her mind. No matter what was happening around her, she is always able to find a way to take a break from it, even if it may only be a short break. It was probably these rejuvenation processes that kept her energy going, the energy that Ralph believed Saunivdow so needed now.

The 600 wound through the pretty communities of Southwood and LeCelle, just south of the

college town. She could see school students walking in the streets, chatting in clusters, some who eventually boarded the bus when it stopped. School students are usually optimistic about their future, she thought, but why do so many turn out to be miserable twenty-something or thirty-somethings, she thought briefly. She could see people strolling on the streets, doing their everyday business. She could see the bargain shops, which may have looked plain and a mere refuge for those who did not have enough to those who cannot dream, but to Apple they held endless possibilities and opportunities. They weren't as good as the multi-resource barns specifically geared towards helping people create events and culture that you can find in Eastlands, but were still pretty good places for resources to do those things on the cheap if you didn't know Eastlands existed.

Then the bus drove into the seaside town of Phoenix. Apple was now in the mood for a beachside holiday. The holiday was going to start right now, and although it was only going

to last eight minutes, she was going to fully enjoy herself. The surf gear shops and the nice cafes that lined the streets were just the right thing to get her into the mood. Pretty people were strolling happily on the street, some carrying backpacks and surfboards. The little shopping complex was a great reminder of the 24-hour shops at holiday towns she had visited when she was younger. Soon they have reached the beautiful town centre of Phoenix. It was marked by a garden, with pretty flowers and a fountain in the middle. To its right was the road that led down to the beach. At this point, the bus turned abruptly left, and Apple knew that it was time to say goodbye to Phoenix and that she would be on her way to the next stop soon. Although she had not seen the beach, she had already felt it and absorbed it.

The next stretch of the journey was through parks and golf courses around creeks, and they had to cross a major river. She could just imagine that this was part of the countryside, and the river formed a border between two states, as they often do. The lone bird which

stood upon the top of a little bush, shining under the first signs of the sunset, fits in perfectly. Upon arriving on the other side of the river, the control tower of Saunivdow International Airport came into sight. Ever since she was a little girl, Apple had liked the airport. It was the place where she could dream about far-away places, the place where she could feel that so much of the world is really so close. As they stopped in front of the grand international terminal, and passengers carrying big backpacks came onboard, grand thoughts about far away places, mixed with nostalgic memories of her past travels, flooded Apple. She felt like she was at the intersection of the world, where Asia, Australia, the Americas, Europe, Africa, and places which she couldn't even name, could meet.

Abruptly, the bus returned to the freeway, and Apple woke up from her dream. Now she knew she was on her way to Little Town. Little Town was the second last suburb that the 600 would go through before it would arrive at its destination. It was also the section which Apple

probably liked best. Little Town was where artist, people with creative thoughts and importers of exotic ideas gathered. It was where the creative exchanged ideas, where the open-minded debated things, and where the dreamers gather. It was a place which was always colourful and alive. The exhibits on the streets and in the shops were different every time she passed through the main street, and posters posted everywhere were ever-changing too. The material was affordable, and this has kept the creativity going. Today, this place seemed to be flooded by high-tech-looking designs in the shops. Literally, you could dress like a robot for just 40 dollars. You may wonder why anyone would like to dress like a robot, but once you see these really beautiful human-robots (they look nothing like the kind you would see in a 1960s movie), you would just stare in awe. The artists here are really good, thought Apple. On the streets things were more organic - a more human, colourful form of beauty was celebrated, with fashion styles mainly consisting of bright colours contrasted with black. The

fashion here surely is different from the outside world, but it works just as well, thought Apple.

Finally, the 600 terminated at Southlakes Wonderland, a medium sized shopping centre. Apple walked through the shopping centre, something that she quite enjoyed doing. She is definitely not a material girl, but she feels that she should keep in touch with the world and all its latest ideas, and this is especially important in the middle of the week when the mind is bogged down with other figures, facts and ideas. This was also going to be part of her one-hour holiday this afternoon.

There was a free internet kiosk in the shopping centre. She tried to access her email there, and was able to see that one of the Rochelle's had indeed replied. But she couldn't open the message. After three tries, she gave up, instead keeping her excitement for tonight when she would go home and read it.

Chapter 3. The Apple Complex

Within three minutes she was out of the shopping complex and in the opposite building - the Southlake community centre. This was one of her main hubs in the city. She knew that a few of her friends would be in there - there always are - the same people come here again and again. She walked in, walked straight pass the reception, which had just been prettily decorated by one of the receptionists.

"Hey Jordan," she waved to him, trying to be especially enthusiastic today.

"Hi Apple," he waved back, "how's your day going?"

"Very good. I am feeling great," she said as she strolled along the corridor. She would have said that on any way, but today she was really feeling great, because she had an idea in mind for her broadcast which she was going to start work on as soon as she got back to Eastlands. For now she was just going to enjoy herself. "Happy people always need a break," she said to herself.

She strolled straight into the lounge, which was golden yellow in a way that didn't hurt your eyes, and it felt very comfortable after a hard days' work. There, she saw a few of her good friends laying on the sofa comfortably. It was only 4pm outside but in here it felt like a comfortable evening, when the sun has just set and everybody still had the energy to make a good gathering.

"Hey, it's Apple," John said.

"Hi John. Hi everybody," Apple returned the favour. On some days she would just say it matter-of-factly, as if greetings were a game in which you bounced back whatever is given to you, but today she was in such a good mood that she said the words passionately. This attracted special attention from some of those who were busily reading magazines.

"What's up?" asked Neil.

"Life's very good," returned Apple. "How about you?"

"Well, I'm tired, and a bit bored," said Neil, matter-of-factly.

If this was Eastlands, Apple knew that they

would be talking about ways to find great things to do. At least it would seem appropriate in Eastlands, and especially that Apple had recently acquired a reputation for a good life guru.

However, this being part of Saunivdow, which is part of the rest of the world, this would seem strange. Everyone just accepted 'reality' here, something that bothers Apple sometimes. Apple turned to Peter. He was reading the news.

"What's there in the news?" she asked.

"Well, it appears that the town of Redlands is unhappy about some commercial decision they can't stop..."

"How about the good news? I'm not in the mood for that news," said Apple.

"But that's news," said Pete.

Apple knew that well. In fact she would face the sad, but thought provoking news sometimes. But she just didn't want to spoil today. Therefore, she just said what she has often said about the news. "If you flipped open the newspaper in Saunivdow, any newspaper that is, you will find that there will be four or five

times more bad news than good news," she said.

"Plus, everyone is robotic and sad anyway.

Everyone around me," said Peter.

A thought crossed Apple's mind. "I must beat this despair out of here today," she thought.

After that they had no choice but to turn to discussions about the 'news' in the gossip mags in front of them. "Have you read what Jackie Keav did that night at the party?"....."Did you like what Rennie Hara said?".....

"Such is the life in the rest of the world," she sometimes thought. But still she enjoyed almost an hour of trivial talk and great friendship. "Still a great medium for friendship," she thought.

"I have no place to go for a few days," Peter said suddenly. "My mother had a drinking problem and turned me out, and my father won't take me till the weekend," he said.

"Where do you usually go?" Apple asked.

"I don't know," Peter said, trying to be strong but a little worried.

Apple thought for a while. Here in front of her was truly a friend in need and she would like to

be able to help. She was also probably in a good position to help since she had the Apple Complex and the things she could get in Eastlands.

She would be taking guests home already, why not one more? Maybe she could put a smile on one more face? After all, this was how the gathering in the Apple Complex came to be - she invited the people, and some who found it interesting came back week after week.

"Do you want to see Eastlands?" Apple asked.

"Anywhere," Peter replied.

"Then come on," motioned Apple. "Bye everyone," she said behind her.

The pair walked out. After one hour in the place, her other friends also went home and she headed back to the bus stop, just in time for jumping onto a 360, which took her to somewhere near her own residence in Saunivdow, a small unit which was 10 kilometers from Southlakes.

On some days after college time Apple would retire to her residence in the city, and she would invite her friends in the city to come over.

This was one of those days. The Apple complex, as her friends had always called it, was a special little nest of friendship to all of them. And to Ralph, who was on his way to here now from a secret anti-Axerule meeting where everyone agreed that he should try his best to get Apple involved importantly, also saw it as a potential sanctuary for saving his friends. This place is quite uncontaminated by the substance of despair out there, and also anything that would bring about the despair, like ruthlessness and meanness, and also anything that incites hopelessness, including everything from messages of intolerance to those body image 'ideals' out there that makes one feel helpless. Perhaps if any of them would be so unluckily catch the curse this would be the hospital they should go to.

Apple opened the door to her house. They walked to the stairway, where Apple motioned Peter to go up. "The third room up there is yours for the night," she said. "I have to go and meet my friends now."

"Thank you, thank you," he said, and hurried up. Then Apple walked into the lounge.

It was another day in Apple's house, where she and her friends gather every afternoon to talk about life and everything in it. This afternoon, Tasmynn was the first to arrive.

"How was your day," Apple asked as usual.

"Regular," replied Tasmynn. "But I am getting nowhere nearer to my goal."

"Don't worry, this club is all about friends coming together to achieve dreams, and we'll make sure that you'll get there," Apple replied.

At that point, Cheryl, Ralph and Monica entered the room.

"I've had the best day today," proclaimed Cheryl. Unlike most of the people here, she just wanted a regular, happy life. She was far more easily satisfied than any of them.

Ralph didn't seemed to be that upbeat though. He slumped himself in the corner. "Thinking about the world again," thought Monica. "The world maybe crappy but we're having fun. You should really pull yourself out of this." Monica was a typical popular crowd person, she would accept nothing less than the long lists of contacts and activities she has gotten used to

since primary school, but she didn't hope for much more either.

Walton was the last to arrive. He was the male equivalent of Monica. They were different mainly in the ways conventional males and females were different. And as usual, Cheryl had been waiting for him. She was so pleased to see him that she gave her a hug when he finally entered the room. "How's your day been?" she asked eagerly.

"I'm fine," Walton replied, seemingly tired. The sight of Monica and Walton together triggered certain thoughts for Apple. Why is it that in this world to be popular you had to be typical? Is it because there is too much misunderstanding and mistrust in this world, so much that one can only handle people like them? And does this effectively mean that minority people are marginalised and never heard of much? A horrible thought struck Apple: this would lead to a vicious cycle of discrimination. But now was not the time for random negative things like this, something that Apple knew she was very prone to although she didn't show it. The train of thought did not just stop, however. Apple was

now a bit troubled about Rochelle's behaviour - maybe something bad had gone on?

Monica led the conversation. "What do you think of my fashion sense today," she asked.

"Very beautiful," Cheryl replied, her mood apparently better.

Tasmynn's mood also improved. Talking about things like this made her think of her dreams of the red carpets. She has been dreaming to make it bug for six years now.

"Girly talk, not for me," Walton thought. "But I liked the way Cheryl so easily turned on her happy face again."

Seeing a better situation in front of her eyes, and having told herself that nothing is likely to have collapsed overnight, Apple quickly recovered - so quick that nobody noticed her zoning out just two minutes ago. Meanwhile, everyone could still see Rochelle battling it out in her head.

"Want something to eat?" Apple asked them. Then they all followed her into the kitchen. Now Ralph seems to be finally recovering from the battle, while Tasmynn still had her head stuck in

her dreams. The path to the kitchen now seemed like a red carpet to her. Meanwhile, Walton now had his eyes on Cheryl - but she hasn't noticed.

Entertainment at Apple's place wasn't for everyone. Everything was simple and clean. There were little snacks, juice, but no liquor - in fact, never mention this in Apple's dream world. They would talk about funny things, warm things, and dreams for the world, but they were never going to just get drunk to avoid the world's problems. You would also have to use your brains too - just reiterating the content of this week's Goss Weekly wouldn't work with this crowd. Apple said living this way was real living where you think, feel and create.

For Monica, who didn't live like that during any other hour of her life, it was just a break from her usual life. Everyone who was in the in-crowd had to do something special of their own, be it traditional rites, 'cutting edge' spirituality, being a pioneer in an obscure field.... This was part of her 'special experiences' to write in her curriculum vitae to vie for the in-crowd's queen position. "Isn't this for little kids," Monica thought,

as the happy music came on. "If I lived like this everyday life would be hell," she subconsciously thought, although in her conscious thought she had to live the part of the flashy queen having a special experience. After all, Apple is the author of a 'different' broadcast and is well loved in a small circle, and she can count as a guru. The crowd, while not always liking the 'superficial ideas' she brings, nevertheless welcomes her as the gossip girl who brings the latest in town, which was, according to Apple, not unimportant to consider when thinking about the world.

They were almost finishing their snack when Cheryl suddenly went over to Apple. It's time, she thought.

"How's Eastlands really like?" Cheryl asked. "I am doing a personal project on different destinations, and since I've been through piles and piles of information on typical places which are not much different from here in Saunivdow, a different place like Eastlands would certainly make things interesting."

"Life is different. The people get to really live, they get to express themselves, and their creativity is put to use, although still probably not as much as I would like," Apple started.

"But how? You always say this, but how is it different? What is there really in the town?"

Cheryl said, seemingly unsatisfied.

Apple thought for a moment.... If she was going to bring one visitor to Eastlands, why not bring more?

"Actually, you'll have to see to feel and believe. Since tomorrow is a holiday, maybe you'll want to come with me?" she said.

Cheryl thought for a moment. "Yes, sure," she said.

Ralph was sulking again. "Ralph, you wanna see something that's happier? I can take you too," Apple offered.

It was another ten seconds before the reply came.

"Yes, thanks," he said finally.

When they were alone, Ralph asked Apple if there was any progress. But by then Apple had decided to take a stand against all potentially

negative thoughts intruding into her territory at least for the rest of the day, something she decided would be very important to undertake for the sake of her mental health.

"No more talk of conspiracies. I've had enough," Apple said squarely.

"No, I am not going to argue here. But any news of the girl?" asked Ralph, calm on the surface, but desperate too as he was afraid that he would lose Apple's patience if things didn't roll quickly enough.

"No news yet," Apple said. "Don't worry, I'll keep you updated. We're in this together."

Ralph was relived on hearing those last words.

Otherwise, it was just a good, casual night with friends. They ordered takeaway from a nearby cafe for dinner. After dinner, they spent the night in the house chatting away. Peter was not involved, however. He had long since gone to bed, having already spent three days on the streets. This gathering was also unofficially agreed as private, and it wouldn't be appropriate to introduce someone to disrupt a great night like this.

Finally the night came to an end, and her friends all went home.

"See you all, people," Apple said.

"Bye Apple, thanks for the fun," they all said.

"I'll be back tomorrow," said Cheryl.

"Be here at eight in the morning," said Apple, as she closed the door.

Apple went into the privacy of her room, and started her computer. Excitedly, she opened her email, and found the message sent to her from Rochelle. Excitedly, she opened it.

"Hey Apple,

Thanks for your message. I'd really like to make friends! Since you said you are a local, could you meet me somewhere? Just text me on 562-198-760 to discuss the location.

Here's something about me: I am 16 years old, have pink hair and brown eyes. I live in Southlands with my parents and two brothers. I just like to chat on the internet with my friends, meet new people and keep up with what's going on out there. You'll find out more on the

day.

Your friend,

Rochelle.

p.s. Where did you find me, and what made you look out for me? I would really like to know."

Apple was pleasantly surprised to see the forthcomingness of the message. A little bit stupid and dangerous though, to be that forthcoming. Maybe she should have been smelling something because of this, but since she was in a good mood she just let it go. Still she was only going to meet her at the community centre, where there are dozens of other people, security guards, and the like.

"Southlakes Community Ctr, 9 Park St' she jammed into her phone. A few moments later she received a 'meet you there' from 562-198-760.

Apple tried to contact Ralph, having promised him that she would keep him up to date. She simply faxed a copy of her email, with "I will meet her at Southlands but don't you dare come - I will sort things out" scribbled on the

bottom, to Ralph.

10 kilometres away, Ralph was almost disappointed that there was no mention of Axerule on it, having unrealistically expected progress at this early stage. But it takes time to talk about these things, he told himself.

Apple's phone rang within five minutes.

"Hi Apple, it's Ralph here." the voice on the other side of the line said. "Thanks for the fax."

"Yes. I will meet Rochelle, and you can start thinking about how to best welcome her. I will let the group know when I think it's appropriate. Tell Cheryl, the next time you meet her, to get the Eastlands tour she designed ready. Just tell her that you're planning to go someday."

"Can I really not come to the meeting in Southlands?" asked Ralph, who thought some preliminary data collection by the Axerule expert himself would be a good way to go.

"You'll meet her, the whole group will. It's just not going to be the right kind of meeting here," said Apple.

"Okay," said Ralph. "Tell me about anything special."

"I will."

Feeling satisfied, Apple just tied up her loose ends for the day, and went to her room to listen to some of her favourite music. Then she went to bed.

The next morning was chilly. Normally Apple would be struggling to get out of bed on a day like this, but in the company of great friends there was always a warm glow around the cold. This morning Apple woke up first, but the other two followed soon. Peter and Cheryl met each other unexpectedly in the lounge room when Apple was still using the bathroom. When Apple came out, it was apparent that the two had introduced. They were two very different characters seemingly from different planets, but they seemed to like each other, at least at this first meeting. Apple went up to do a brief introduction anyway.

"Cheryl, this is Peter, who is also coming to Eastlands with us. Peter, this is Cheryl."

"Nice to meet you," both said at almost the same time, as they smiled broadly and shook hands.

They had their breakfast quickly, and walked to the station together.

Chapter 4 - Apple's Marching Band

At 8:30 in the morning, the three arrived at Lakehurst Station, a small suburban station in Saunivdow. They waited amongst the few people at the station. Normally, on a Friday morning, there would be crowds of people here waiting for a train while getting ready for work. However, since today was a public holiday, there were no more than a few lonely people. When the 8:42 arrived, it was full of empty seats, and Apple and her friends found themselves an empty car. Apple imagined this was a private room on a first-class train, available to her for this gathering of friends on this special day. And it was a special day, the day that she was going to bring some friends into Eastlands for the first time. She had thought about it for so long, but every time she was going to open her mouth to make the invitation

the words never came out. She was just too scared that it would turn out wrong. But lately her confidence was building up, and her wish for her friends to come home with her have just reached a new high. The excitement had been boiling up in her for the past few days, and by yesterday she was going to invite at any chance.

Meanwhile, Peter and Cheryl were starting to get friendly.

"So where do you live usually?," Cheryl asked.

"In Mountainville, near Southlakes," Peter replied.

"It's a nice place, just like Lakehurst, although it is different. In Lakehurst it is just a friendly chatty community, whereas in my area they are a bit more activity orientated. But it is all good. At least it is not all violent like Lidell, or all snobbish like Belonga."

"I like to here about different, yet good places. They just make our world more colourful," said Cheryl.

"What do you usually do during a day?" Cheryl asked Peter. "I am a student at the Saunivdow university. You should know my typical day already by knowing Apple's."

"I work at the Community Centre at Southlakes, where people come in to chat and have fun," replied Peter.

"What's that like? I've never been there. Though being me, I would have liked to come just as I would have liked to visit different places every day, my friends never seem keen. So I never had the chance."

"Well, Apple goes every few days. Doesn't she tell you?" Peter asked.

"No, she never talked about it. But can you tell me more?" asked Cheryl.

"Well, where should I begin? I will put it this way: people generally think that this place is a losers' house because there is really nothing glamorous, and it is run by community opportunity workers, unlike the posh community clubs of the rich hills. Indeed it is more often than not that rejects come here. This is probably because Southlakes is not a glamorous area. But we all have fun there. And wise people like Apple, who sometimes compare us to Eastlands, can see what is really going on here."

Just then, the train pulled into Redlands, the

intercity interchange where they were going to change trains. As they were walking out of the suburban service and across the platforms, Apple's mind drifted to Pete's words yesterday: "the town of Redlands is unhappy about some commercial decision they can't stop..." And indeed, as they pass through the station concourse they could see the protest signs, though Peter was probably too immersed in talking to Cheryl to notice. Apple's mind, however, began to feel the same helplessness as those who are going to lose their community over the new scheme which diverted resources away from them to the richer areas, which was dressed without much effort as a redevelopment. "What can be done?" she thought. Whenever she had these thoughts, half of her would be dragged into another world, partly fantastically ideal, partly full of debate and action. Walking up to platform 5 and boarding the train to Eastlands went through her head without registering any memory, and when she was fully conscious again she was on an express train amongst suburban houses.

Apple didn't know how to best put it, but she decided that an introduction to Eastlands is needed for her two guests, lest any drama happened, no matter how unlikely this would be.

"We are only ten minutes away now. How about some destination information, provided to you by your host, free of charge?" she started.

"Yes, thanks," Cheryl said softly.

"Eastlands is not really a big town. It is more like a suburb which is outlying from Saunivdow. However, you will find all sorts of things there that you may not have seen before. Plus...." She didn't know how to best put it, as her two guests did not know her situation in Eastlands yet. But after a split second's pause, almost too short to be detected, she spurted out the rest of the sentence, "you will be meeting a lot of my family out there in Eastlands, some of which may be quite loud and take you by surprise."

"You mean your relatives?" Cheryl asks.

"Yes, but not in the conventional way. You see, we count social parents, ceremonial siblings and the like as family in Eastlands, and when

we vow to never break off from each other it is a real vow. So although my immediate genetic family is actually small, my social family is big, and most of it is people who don't even look a bit like me."

Apple paused for a while, but she knew there was a second truth they ought to know. "The other thing is that, here they know me there on the streets. I have a bit of a name here, but as you will see, there are many other people in this situation too, and it is just a natural and not uncommon thing here in Eastlands. So don't look like you're in awe seeing random people saying hello to me, or you'll be laughed at like some of the other tourists. Just sit back and relax, ask me about anything you want to know, and don't make a fuss if there's a..." (there was a brief pause again) "...crowd."

When they arrived at Eastlands Central there was indeed a crowd waiting for them. "Apple, you promised me," they heard the voice of a screamy girl. Most people just went on their everyday business, while some people were clearly looking out for Apple. It seemed like

there were people from two worlds here, one where Apple was very important, and another one where she is just another girl in the street. It was clear that Apple was very popular among some here. But how come she really can have so many friends here, so many that there are people screaming for her every now and then, her guests wonder. "It's Apple! It's Apple," another voice screamed, as a group of five girls and two boys emerged from the crowd and walked up to Apple. "Can we come with you," one boy asked. "Yes, come along," Apple invited. Her two guests still stared in awe.

When they were finally out in the open, they had become a team of 36 people, as if they were marching to protest against something. One girl even held up a sign saying "the Apple Brigade". But even stranger to the two guests, Apple wasn't the only one here. There were similar signs and calls for Taryne, Edward, Rachel, Rallan and so on. There were other marching bands on the street. The two guests thought they should probably remain silent until they had reached Apple's house, but some in

the Apple Brigade started introducing themselves. The guests had no choice but to introduce themselves, albeit awkwardly. Peter pretended to be shy, not wanting any more attention in this strange world. The things around him all seemed very nice and interesting, but also overwhelming, and it didn't help that he was with a group of strangers engaging in an activity he didn't understand, and not knowing where they were walking to. He now had second thoughts about coming to Eastlands - life on the streets was poor but it was at least his world. As these thoughts were racing through Peter's mind, he gradually slipped behind in the brigade, and Cheryl, who kept up very well, was now quite far ahead of him. Cheryl, being the friendly, talkative type, was really enjoying the company of her new friends. "You're obviously not from here," a rosy-cheeked girl asked.

"Yes, you've guessed it. I'm not hard to spot, am I?" Cheryl replied.

"It's just that people from out there are a bit different," the girl replied. "It's not that we don't like the people from outside, it's just that in this

place, being such a different place, obviously it's a bit hard for outsiders to look like an insider," the girl said.

"Don't worry, you'll find out all about the wonders of this place, and you'll feel right at home soon," another friendly boy told her.

Cheryl was also constantly keeping her eyes out for something called the 'foundation', something that Ralph told her to look out for. Meanwhile, Apple felt so happy to be home again. Here, she could not feel the grip of the negative things. Yesterday's frustrations were all gone now. The outside trouble always seemed small and far away here, even if they were huge and insurmountable just 30kms away in Southlands, Saunivdow. This was certainly a good place for any tired heart to rest and regain strength, and she felt quite satisfied that she would indeed bring one in to be rejuvenated some time soon. Ralph, who had believed in curses even before this, had said that there are some places, which by their design, are impenetrable to certain curses. Apple didn't believe in such things, not seriously

at least, but she could say in a more neutral way that, perhaps this place was impenetrable by despair? Wait a minute! Maybe Ralph also thought this way, and thought that this place was impenetrable by Axerule's curse? What a load of crap! But at least now she could see that they were indeed working in the same direction. Sort of.

They arrived at a bus rank. There were ranks for 200, 203, 204, 206 and so on, one after the other. Peter kept eyeing the rank to see which one the brigade was interested in, but they seemed to be paying little attention to the endless signs with numbers. Instead, they abruptly turned into a little street, and onto a quieter, parallel big street, where a lot of these walking brigades have come too. There were many little huts lined up across the road. Their brigade walked until they could find an empty hut, where they finally settled down. The pretty huts faced a park and a beach with a river beyond the beach, and the loud noises of the people's chattering seemed to vapourised nicely in the sweet-smelling air. It seemed so much like the

beginning of a nice holiday, something that Peter has not had for four years, that he dropped his negative thoughts. Just at this time, an announcement blared out of the loudspeakers overhead. "Chartered buses are arriving in five minutes. Please get your destination and fares ready."

With that, Peter saw Apple taking out a piece of paper from her bag, and checking the details on it, before slipping it into her pocket. A few other people in other huts did the same. Meanwhile, everyone was searching their pockets for the correct fare. The talking was now louder than ever, and the visitors just happily soaked up the atmosphere, which seemed so enjoyable, though they didn't actually know what was going on. A moment later Apple went over Cheryl, who was initially too absorbed in the fun to notice her. Apple then waved Peter to come over.

"I'm sorry that I have been leaving you in the dark. I just had something to sort out. You must be wondering what all this is about," said Apple. "Yes?" they said in unison.

"This place is called Lakeside Station. It is where we can hire charter buses to take teams of people to their destinations. You see, it is common for people to move in teams here, and it would be quite inconvenient to use public transport. Therefore charter buses are popular here," said Apple.

"But don't they cost a lot?" Cheryl asked.

"Not if you're in Eastlands," replied Apple. "One of the greatest beauties of this place is that things - resources - are affordable, and therefore chances are abundant for everyone. It is the beauty of the system here. Everything is invented around two ideas – family and culture creation. So if you want to create an event and bring your big family along, it is very do-able. By the way, we also value dreams here. If you dream of something, anything, and you're willing to work at it, there's a great chance that you'll go some way."

"Where are we going?" Peter asked.

"You must be imagining somewhere far off, but actually, we're just going to my place," Apple said, as they were boarding the bus which had just arrived. "It takes only ten minutes, and I

know it's a lot of fuss for a ten minute trip, but with this crowd here I can't see any other way."

The bus glided through some pretty parts of the city, and turned into a more suburban area, where street after street were lined by suburban houses. At first glance, they all looked like the same, almost boring streets that you would find in any suburb across the world. But on closer inspection, the guests were amused that a lot of them had funny names like 'The Star Hole' and 'The Tree Root', and had different little decorations on them. One had a map that was about as big as a real estate agent's for sale sign, another one had these little planets like the front yard was a little planetarium. Some looked like the entrance to theatres, while others looked like casual holiday houses.

Finally, the bus parked outside the driveway of Apple's House. It was yellow and brown in colour and not particularly big, but it looked quite comfortable. There were things that seem to try to make it stand out, like every other house in Eastlands. It had a plaque on the front

of it, saying its name 'The Grand Central', and there were quite a few words underneath it too, which Cheryl couldn't make out in the distance and the glare of the sun. There was a map and a directory, just like quite a lot of the other places they had seen on their way here. There was also something which appeared like a computer screen on the map. The crowd got off the bus, still excited. Together they marched into the house, led by Apple. "Mom's needing a rest today, so be quiet," they heard Apple say. She opened the door and everybody marched in after leaving their shoes in front of the door. The crowd seemed to have immediately been muted, like when one presses the mute button on the remote control, just as they passed through the door. The house was lovely, with its yellow golden shades and cool green doors, Cheryl thought. Moving quietly and in an ordered fashion, they passed through the corridor, where they reached a flight of stairs leading down to the basement. They turned down the stairs into the basement, where there were three doors.

Apple opened the door to their left, and flicked on the lights. A big room with orange-white walls revealed itself. Inside there was an old sofa, a mat on the floor that could fit plenty of people, a computer, a bookshelf, a little table, and booth that Peter was wondering what it could be used for. The crowd entered the room and spread all over the floor. Apple locked the door tight, and at that instant the crowd seemed to have some life again, suddenly. Apple went over to chat with a few people, and the room remained a slightly disorganised, but cosy sort of place for the next five minutes. Then she went over to join her guests.

"Do you know all the people here well?" they asked her.

"Some of them, but not really all of them," she replied. "But in Eastlands it is safe to invite people home. It is a great thing to do - especially when they really want to come so badly."

"So do you have this meeting all the time?" asked Peter.

"Well, somewhere between once every two

weeks and twice a week, depending on how available I am and how many people want to come," replied Apple.

"Is it just for chatting?" asked Peter.

"There's more to it. There's actually more fun to it.

You'll see," said Apple, who then left them.

Apple reappeared a few moments later, in front of the room. "Anyone want to see me doing my show?" she asked.

"Yes," they all screamed.

"I'll prepare my stuff now, but you'll have to be quiet," said Apple. "And keep clear of the recording booth - you will see it all in the television, and I will be able to hear you with my headphones when the red icon appears on the TV." With that she went over to her computer and keyed in something. After that she went over to the TV and flicked it on, changing the channel to a blank screen. Then she walked over to the booth and disappeared behind it.

They watched her did all parts of her show on the television. Sometimes she would come out for a break, and may be she would ask the crowd for some opinions. She even invited

somebody in two or three times. At the end of it, they were rewarded by being the first people to watch this new show, which wouldn't come out for a week. After the show, it was snack and autograph time. Little snacks and drinks were provided on a side table, as Apple fulfilled her promise to sign the thirty-odd autographs. That night they had a catered dinner party, where everyone paid just six dollars for the catering, and had a good night of chatting, dancing and singing along to the music.

One of the reasons why she didn't invite her whole group here was because she knew that Monica wouldn't approve of such a kind of night. Everything other than the most popular night club in the city was cheap to her, and this was a travesty even for the poorest human being. But for Apple and most of this crowd here, they were enjoying one of the best types of gatherings in the world, and the club, where you were bothered by half naked women, where the music was too loud and sometimes crappy, where you couldn't chat or sing along to the music with your friends comfortably, and

where alcohol was making a truly comfortable and friendly time almost impossible, had nothing on this.

By ten in the evening all her guests had left, but there was one more thing to do – her Saunivdow friends had to meet the family. So she pressed the event button and typed in some sort of message, which saw a dozen or so webcam conversation boxes open one by one on her computer screen.

“These are all my family” she explained as box after box started to fill with anywhere between two to five people in them.

Chapter 5 - The Land Curses Cannot Reach

The next morning, as the sun shone brightly into Apple's room, Apple and Cheryl were still fast asleep. The fun of last night was tiring indeed. Today, being a Saturday, they could afford to sleep in a bit.

At 9:45 am Apple finally stirred. She was dreaming that she was in a strange yet wonderful place having a good time, and she was in a good mood to start the day. Gently, she gave Cheryl a stir, who responded to it vaguely, being still between sleeping and waking. After heading to the bathroom, Apple went down to the basement where Peter was staying for the night. He, too, was fast asleep. He did not respond to Apple's stirring or calling. Probably had too much in the last few days, Apple thought. She left him, thinking that he may need that extra sleep.

Apple and Cheryl sat down to breakfast together.

"At what time do they expect you home?" asked Apple.

"After lunchtime today," replied Cheryl. "When I go to gatherings like this they expect me to do for the whole next morning."

"That's good. Today I am going to take you on a trip around town. You will see this great town of ours," offered Apple.

After breakfast, Apple went down to see Peter, who was now finally awake.

"We're heading out to town. Do you want to come with us?" she asked.

"Yes," he said as he yawned.

"Well, then quickly go and have breakfast, and we'll be off in twenty minutes," said Apple.

Being only a group of three this time, there was no charter bus. Instead, the three walked together to the local station. They passed the local mall on the way.

"This is the local mall of this village," Apple introduced. "It is like a mini access point to the city. Here, you can get, or at least order, all kinds of services."

The guests looked around at the shops. There was a bakery, a chemist, a deli shop, a real estate agent, and the like, just like every town. There were also some stores that the guests did not seem to understand, like the Everyday Gold MRS, The All Urban Kiosks, and the Universe Ordering Station.

"What's a MRS?" asked Cheryl, as she pointed at the sign.

"MRS stands for Magic Resources Store. It is where you will get resources to make things,

experiment things, decorate your house etc. You can get all kinds of style at very affordable prices. Do you want to have a look?"

"Sure."

So they headed off to Everyday Gold.

Everyday Gold had a very welcoming sign on top of it. It was violet-blue in colour with big golden words. The entrance was also big and grand. Inside there were many sections. There was an aisle for 'everyday decorations', an aisle for 'ideas magic', an aisle for 'all sorts of DIY magic', and the like, and there were also aisles representing Europe, Asia, Africa, TechLand, HippieLand, SlickLand etc. It seemed like a warehouse for people with ideas of all kinds.

"What's this place supposed to be for?" asked Peter.

"Well, it is a places where you can pick up your wares. It is sort of a arts material center, a warehouse store, a supermarket and an everyday bargain shop all rolled into one. It is the one stop shop for anyone who wants to build anything," said Apple.

"Sounds interesting," said Cheryl, "I wish they had more of these out there in Saunivdow."

She was feeling good that her guests seemed to like Eastlands. All that negative news that she received in the past few days was now out of her mind. This was the kind of place to go to stop one from spiraling down with the negativity out there, to eventually taking to believing crazy conspiracies like the Axerule, she thought. She thought she may as well convince the semi-depressed Ralph to come here to spend some of his days. Maybe this visit by Cheryl, which was ultimately his idea after all, could be used to persuade him to take time to come.

They had left Everyday Gold behind and headed out to the city on the train. Their first stop was Wonder Studios. "Now I'm going to show you what every Eastlander likes to do," said Apple.

Just then, she received a message on her phone.

"I've some important news to tell you, and perhaps all of our friends. I've found something, and it may be urgent. Please do organise a

meeting as soon as you come back out.

-Ralph

p.s. Remember to go and see happy, happening places."

Bother, Apple thought. He had effectively threatening to break his promise not to involve the group. Apple acted as if nothing had happened, and continued on her journey towards Wonders. Ralph also knew that it wouldn't really change Apple's mind - he just did it as part of his long campaign to convert Apple, or at least get the information out to the group eventually. Still, the time was running out part was actually real, and he would tell Apple all about it on Tuesday when they next met.

They were now inside Wonders. There were people going in and out, just like Apple had told them. There were signs pointing towards places like sound studio, videos places and artshop.

"What do people do here?" asked Peter.

"This is a studio, so of course people come here to make art. You can make a video, record a song, make a great poster, or easily make

computer art. It is all very affordable, and whatever you create is all yours. It has been in operation since 1998, when the technology started to become affordable," replied Apple.

"Do Eastlanders really like doing this very much?" asked Peter.

"Yes, we all like it. We use it in our everyday lives. Like some of the better things on my show have actually come from here too," said Apple.

"Hi, Apple," somebody said.

"Hi, Lena," waved Apple across the hall. "That's my friend Lena, she does a show quite like mine. Today she is here to do her masterpiece of the year," Apple explained to her friends.

Cheryl spotted that there was a cupboard on one of the walls, showcasing Eastlands-wide sensations that were made here. She spotted one that was Apple's.

"Is that really yours?" asked Cheryl.

"Yes, that was the one that I wrote while I was lying in my bed one Friday night. And everybody just turned out to like it."

They had to leave the Studio after an hour because there were too many people in there,

and it was meaningless to hang around with no business there. They headed off to the Eastlands Central Community Foundations.

"The Community Foundations," Cheryl thought.

"The important place that Ralph was talking about. Gotta pay attention here." Ralph had said that Apple talked about this place when they were talking about campaigns to change the world, and it was a place where all sorts of wonderful ideas are turned into action, a sort of place you won't see in Saunivdow. "I know you probably aren't as interested in these things as we are, but will you please pay some attention and bring to me anything that is exciting?" she remember Ralph saying yesterday.

"This is where all the great ideas get turned into actions, where all the great campaigns happen, where all the most wonderful clubs start. It is one of the capitals of Eastlands life," Apple said, proudly introducing the institution which they were entering.

After visiting the foundation, it was time to return to Saunivdow for Cheryl.

"There's a lot more to see here, like the

interesting shops and the places to hang out, so I hope you'll be back sometime. See you on Tuesday," waved Apple.

"I'll definitely come back again. See you," Cheryl waved back.

Apple and Peter then returned to The Grand Central on the train, and arrived just in time for the lunch Apple's mother had prepared for them.

Chapter 6 - Finding Axerule

That very evening, after Peter left, Ralph gave Apple another call.

"How was the trip? Was everything fine?" Ralph asked.

"Yes. We all had great fun. You should have come!" said Apple.

"Did you see the Foundation?" asked Ralph.

"Of course!" said Apple. "Everyone who comes to Eastlands must see that."

"Especially those that might need it for a refuge. Any progress on the Axerule thing?" asked

Ralph.

"Well, no. Why? I've been on holidays. Trust me, the world isn't going to end soon," said Apple.

"Well, I have reports that one of the people running for Mayor of Saunivdow City is a Axerulan. We must go spread the word help our mayor retain his position, or our city will become...."

"Okay, okay. I will listen to the story. Fax me the details, I can't get things like this just over the phone," said Apple.

"Okay, shall I do it now?"

"Yes, please. I will talk to you again later. See you," said Apple.

Apple really still didn't believe in the Axerule thing, but if someone associated a certain candidate with Axerule then maybe something's wrong with him? Perhaps this was the real Axerule that Saundivdowans ought to fear? Anyway, it would be important to read the thing first.

Apple started up her computer right after that. Unexpectedly, Apple found that a new contact by the name of Konio was inviting her

for a little talk. She accepted the invitation.

Konio: Hi, Miss Apple. Thanks for accepting my invitation.

Apple: Who are you actually?

Konio: Well, that is an interesting question. Did you try to contact a particular Pink Head named Rochelle?

Apple: Well, yes, so what about it?

Konio: And did you find out about her through something related to Axerule?

Apple: Yes, so?

Konio: Well, that's how we found out about you. First of all, there is indeed no Axerule - it was created by a group of friends, us. Those artefacts like the one you responded to were scavenged from random locations, edited by us, and put up in strategic locations to attract people like you. And we've found you!

Apple: I knew all along that Axerule is a prank. But why do you have to play pranks on people? And isn't it just not right to use people whom you don't know and you can't get permission from as bait?

Konio: I know how you feel, but let me explain.

We are disheartened by the fact that people out there accept everyday life as hopeless too readily. They don't hope for better, don't chase ideals, so nothing improves. Although many groups have cited us, we actually have nothing hidden or political, just this. Thus we started the phenomenon to bring together concerned people and hopefully awaken some. And we don't respond to conspiracy seeking or politically motivated people - we just wait for people like you.

Apple stared at the last few sentences. She was quite surprised - though she knew that it was a prank all along, she didn't expect it to be so simple - so simple that she almost wanted to laugh. On the other hand, she felt a mixture of anger and happiness - she was happy that there were people out there looking out for this important issue, and even willing to act, but she was angry that they were acting quite unethically and potentially damagingly, and their prank was adding to the fear that was out there rather than actually bringing any hope. She was now so drawn into this that she didn't

even notice the fax just coming in.

Apple: So what do you want?

Konio: For people like you to keep in touch with us, and help us through our cause. So are you willing to?

Apple wondered what she should say. Surely it was a good cause, but she couldn't really be part of an organisation that acts in such ways, can she? In the end she resorted to her default option.

Apple: I'll think about it.

Konio: I'll give you time. But do keep in touch! And we will keep emailing you if you don't mind, just to keep you up to date on things.

Apple: How many of you are involved?

Konio: That's a good question. The Axerule thing is put out by some of us only, but all of us are associated with the SMILE group which is completely dedicated to this cause. SMILE is from Primitown and is decades old and members have been involved in numerous successful incidents, some of the major happy

endings in the 1960s-1990s. Most of the people in SMILE don't do our kind of thing - they don't even know we're doing it, but we are young, and sporty, so we do and we're cool. Anyway, if you keep in touch we'll introduce you to SMILE.

Apple stared at the screen. Primitown - wasn't that the older twin sister of Eastlands, the city she had heard of so many times when she was growing up but nobody had seen or was even sure of where it was? That was where the Eastlands way of living had come from, they told her. Everyone thought Primitown was an ancient city, but apparently it is still alive! If only she could see it for herself and bring the good news back to Eastlands! By the way, people from Primitown should be nice since they lived the Eastlands way and everyone from Eastlands is nice. This thought actually added a bit of trust for SMILE in Apple's mind, although Konio gained none of it. "If the people from Primitown knew you were playing pranks on people they'd have a lot to say," thought Apple, as she typed her last line for the day.

Apple: I'll talk to you again some time later this week.

After all this, Apple started to think about how she should deal with Konio and his strange group. Maybe she should just ignore him? No, this was a potential friend. Plus she really wanted to know who the SMILE are - they seemed like a cool and successful bunch, unlike the ones here - plus she loved the thought of getting to see behind the scenes of 'a lot of the happy endings in the 1960s-90s'. And Primitown - she couldn't lose it! This was definitely some opportunity to hold onto. But how should she hold onto it? Maybe she should just tell him her alternative plans to the problem, and continue to keep in contact, but keep clear of the Axerule business? But still, she couldn't bear being accomplice to all the pranks. What would Rochelle think if she knew how she was being used?

This brought her back to Rochelle. Where did she fit in? Konio's news was simple: she was just used as bait. She was simply a girl who needed

help and needed friends. From now on, she would have to be completely dissociated with Axerule, Konio and the such.

But back to Konio and Axerule now. She was going to need to persuade them to stop the pranks. Maybe she would need threaten expose in the case of uncooperativeness. But she didn't want to do this outrightly. Prank or not prank, she could feel how real what Konio was worrying about is, and she can't let it down. She had known that Axerule was fake all along, but at least the idea that something which she had actually been worrying about for a whole year could be reduced to one single enemy was still relatively comforting. In fact, she had been more worried than Ralph recently about the world, it's just that it is also important to go on with life and not miss out on life. She had also not told anyone so far - she was afraid it would lead to misunderstanding and spoil moods. Back to the idea of Axerule. But no, one can't think like this - this type of thinking had led to many wars and misery. She had finally found the real reason why she could not let Axerule go on, why she had felt so wrong about it even

though it was just a little prank.

Eventually she should have to find out what the real cause, the 'real Axerule' was. For now, the most important task was to provide a better plan, and convince them to come onboard.

The next evening Apple went to chat with Konio again.

Konio: Having a good Sunday evening? Have you made up your mind yet?

Apple: Here's what I think. First, your issue is an important one and is also one of the issues we are very interested in. So we may be able to work together.

Konio: So you're in?

Apple: Not yet, actually. I don't really believe what you are doing is very effective. How many targets have you found so far, and how many of those conspiracists have you reached?

The answer didn't come back for a minute.

Apple sensed that there was some negotiation

going on.

Konio: To tell you the truth, only you actually.

Apple: See, I told you that the main effect you were having is creating fear. Isn't that just opposite to what you want?

Again, there was a minute's wait.

Konio: Actually, we really need to rouse the community's awareness before we can do anything. And I don't think we are creating fear in a lot of people. So what we are doing here is still overall good.

The negotiation was falling towards the failing side, but there was still a long way to go. No need for the threat yet.

Apple: Don't you think there is a better way?

Konio: What better way?

Apple: If you have all the time to create this conspiracy, why not use it to promote what you really want?

Konio: But we need something that would really

make a splash.

Apple: Don't you think they'll hate you when they realise that you were tricking them?

Konio: Oh, so that's what you fear. But they'll never find out. You see, we operate to the public via the anti-Axerule central, and we pretend that Axerule is real all along.

Apple was now a bit more confident. At least she knew that they did fear her weapon.

Apple: But don't you think it's a bit wrong to be behind an evil idea, while make everyone think that you're here to help?

Konio: There are many wrong things in the world.

Apple: Don't think like that. If you are a person who can see ideals, you wouldn't want to be contributing to that pool so fast.

There was another wait.

Konio: So what ideas do you have?

Apple: Well, I don't have a plan for you, but there are at least two things you can do. The

first one is package what you have to say in an attractive form and use the energy that you have been making the prank with towards promoting it. The second one is that you can create a space where your ideal world is already true, so people can experience it and realise.

There was another wait.

Konio: If we change tact, are you willing to help?

Apple: Yes, certainly.

There was yet another wait.

Konio: OK. If you join us, we will stop our activities for now. But we won't promise to stop forever, in case you don't work out.

Apple actually found that a bit offensive, and even dangerous. She couldn't make herself a hostage. So, she thought, show them what's really at stake.

Apple: OK, I'll cooperate, provided that all the Axerule things get removed by tomorrow. I have a friend who will definitely be quite excited if that happens, so I'll know. But also remember that, if I see you doing any of your things again, I can always spread the word around about you. I love your idea but I am really pissed off by your actions.

There was another wait.

Konio: OK, let's keep in touch.

Tomorrow I'll wait for Ralph to say the news, she thought.

She went over to pick up the fax, which was five pages long. She read all of it. It was interesting, but it was also very unfounded. Besides, there was nothing to worry about - this candidate was exceedingly unpopular and he would be lucky to score even 0.1% of the vote.

The next day Ralph did indeed had some 'exciting news' to share with Apple.

"Most of the Axerule output points have gone down!" said Ralph excitedly.

"I know already," said Apple calmly.

"So you're in it now?" asked Ralph.

"No, I'll tell you later," said Apple.

A few moments later when they were in a quiet area, Apple showed Ralph the printouts of the dialogues she had with Konio. She didn't explain all the fuss about Primitown, although that part was probably the most important thing to her.

"No, that Konio must be a guy working for Axerule, who wanted to fool you," said Ralph.

"Okay, okay. Then why did I get my wishes?" argued Apple calmly.

"Because they wanted you to believe them," replied Ralph.

"They're willing to stop their operations for a period of time just to fool one young lady out there?" asked Apple.

Ralph thought for a while.

"Okay, you win," he conceded finally.

"Now let's get onto more important things," suggested Apple. "We will be working with Konio and Co. and you will be part of the team. I will also be inviting some of my other friends who I believe are interested."

"Thanks for inviting me," said Ralph.

"Now, we have arranged a meeting for ten days later. In this period, you and I will have to think hard about what we can contribute to the campaign," said Apple. "But for now, the most important thing is that we all prepare to welcome our new friend Rochelle. I am going to bring her in at the meeting at headquarters tomorrow afternoon. I will announce the news to the group via email tonight, as they all check on Monday night, and I will ask Cheryl to get ready to be a tour guide very soon. I hope that you can bring your great talents to the party. I will be introducing the girl, and she may or may not ask us for help, but if she asks you will have a chance to exercise your talents, being a thinking guy."

That night when Apple was in her own room she gathered a few pieces of paper and a pen,

and began scribbling away. She was writing out her plan to share with Konio and Co. She was starting out with the two golden actions she used for many of the ideas she developed in the past - to make the concept communicatable and a potential phenomenon, and to create a model which the ideal can develop in. The first objective would be all about making the people out there realise what they really want and what they were missing out on. She didn't know if she could do it good enough, but there was always a first trial. As for the latter one, it would start with a simple space she had just created on the internet an hour ago. The internet doesn't save most people but it was a good place to start a small first model for a small community. It was called the Apple's Stars' Room. It was a place for people to talk, especially for 'anyone who felt like a star', because Apple felt that when people believe they are stars it is the beginning to release the ideal seeking mind within. It would have no other rules or specifics just for now, and would be perfected through time.

Chapter 7 Welcoming Rochelle

It was Tuesday afternoon, and Apple was taking the ride to Southlakes on the 600 again. Yesterday evening she had made sure all her friends, the frequenters of the Headquarters, or the Apple Complex as some of her friends called it, knew about Rochelle's arrival, by phoning them one by one. She felt excited. It was a bit nervous, but everything should be ready now. Thoughts of the great time they were going to get this afternoon started to form on Apple's mind, as she watched the towns outside passed by.

It was all by accident that she was now going to meet a new friend, thought Apple. Quite likely, this would be the best reward in the whole Axerule storm. Prank or no prank that was, at least it brought her to found this someone. Maybe it was all meant to be, from how Ralph got sucked into that plot to what is going to happen now? Still, haven't really me

her new friend in person yet, she didn't dare to smile so quickly.

Finally she arrived at Southlakes. She sped through the shopping centre without paying attention to the details that were around her. She was feeling both very excited and very nervous now, and the back door of the shopping complex seemed so far away. Finally she reached it, and there stood the Community Centre just on the opposite side of the road. She carefully crossed it, and before she knew it she had sped past the receptionist, almost forgetting to wave hello. She dashed straight for the lounge, and even before she arrived she saw the unmistakable pink hair.

Rochelle was a pretty young lady. She had stylish strawberry pink hair that was about shoulder length, a pleasant face with a lovely smile, and a friendly attitude about her.

"Hi, are you Rochelle," Apple went ahead and did the formality.

"Yes, you must be Apple," she said. "Nice to meet you!"

"Nice to meet you too!" Apple returned the

greeting. As she was saying the words she could feel that there was just something familiar about Rochelle's face. She had seen it somewhere before.

They sat down to chat.

"So you come here every day?" started Rochelle.

"Not every day. But I am a frequenter of this place. The people are nice and I have great friends here," said Apple.

"I've never been here before, although I always knew where it is," Rochelle said. "I never had the time," she said, seeming a bit sad. "You are a local, so where do you live?"

"Well, I don't actually live in Southlands Central, I live about 10 kilometres from here. Actually I might take you to see my place after this. Is this all right for you?" Apple suggested her next step.

"Yes, as long as I can leave here by six. I have to get home after that," said Rochelle.

"We'll be all done by then," Apple assured her.

"So where did you find out about me exactly?" asked Rochelle.

"On an internet forum that you use, that I just

happened to stumble across when I was searching for something," Apple said, careful to avoid any association with Axerule. "It was in one message you posted a few months back that you said you were a local."

"What message was that?" Rochelle asked, a bit scared now. What could this friendly looking lady already know about me, she could be asking.

Apple decided to come clean on this - it wouldn't hurt to get to the topic in this relatively private place, she decided, now that they had been talking for a while already.

"It was one where you asked for a bit of help. You said that you were having troubles reaching for your dreams. But most importantly you wanted to find friends in the Southlands area, so here I come," explained Apple. Rochelle thought and stared for a while, looking embarrassed, almost flushed.

At this time, Apple also stared into her face. I know where I've seen this face now - she looks so much like Daisy Dreams, except for the hair! Could they be relatives? No, that was stupid,

Apple told herself.

Rochelle picked herself up again soon enough.

"I actually was just a bit troubled at that time.

I'm okay now though."

"You sure you're fine? I'm going to listen if you want to. You can say anything you want, there is nobody in this room at the moment," suggested Apple.

"Well...no, I'm fine," Rochelle said, but there was just that something that seemed to be wanting to cry out at the same time. Apple sensed that Rochelle really wanted to share something with her. She was quite unexpectedly happy that someone who had just met her fifteen minutes ago wanted, at least part of her wanted, to confide something in her. This should be pursued, she thought, it may be the start of a real friendship.

"I am a wish-maker. I make dreams come true for people - well, not entirely anything can come true, but I generally make them feel better," Apple suggested.

"I do have wishes, but nobody would understand," Rochelle said, sad in a sort of romantic way.

"I have seen a lot of very different things, and I may be able to understand if you give me some time," Apple said, in her softest, nicest tone. "I will try my best, and even if I don't understand you completely at least I am going to be on my way to, and will be able to help you in the future."

"It's...also a bit stupid," Rochelle said.

"Nothing's stupid with me. You can dream of everything with me, from flying like a bird to changing the whole world. In fact, I frequently dream of these things," said Apple.

"Promise you won't laugh?" asked Rochelle, softly.

"Promise," Apple said.

Rochelle seemed to struggle for a while. Then she turned to make sure there was nobody around. When she was satisfied of this, she began to speak.

"You see, I want to have a way to create things that communicate how I feel to share with others. I just don't know how I can go by that, or if I have time to do that even? In my life I have always been doing just what other people have told me to, and I think it should be time to

stop doing that now. I am, frankly, sick and tired of following other people's dreams and doing what other people want me to do," said Rochelle.

Why was it such a struggle, thought Apple. There must be something more. But let's work from the first layer.

"Why don't you have time?" asked Apple.

"Well.... maybe it's just more that I don't know how to go by it," Rochelle said.

"What do you want to do really?" asked Apple. Now she was in her full solution consultant-sister mode, which made her satisfied.

"Maybe make something that will convey my message, something like a concert that I design from beginning to end," Rochelle began.

Suddenly she turned from awkward to passionate. Out of all the things she could want to do, it was only as simple as a concert! Wasn't that the stuff life in Eastlands was made of! "You know, I see so many people out there who have lost hope on their life, lost sight of what they can do, and have turned to compromising what they dream of. It's just sad. And if nobody dreams of anything, we'll be

doing nothing. The popular styles out there all don't emphasize dreaming wildly, and this has led to further depression of this natural instinct. I really want to do something about it, and this was what I have been asking friends to help me for," she explained.

She sounds just like Daisy too, thought Apple. What a coincidence! Apple still thought there may be more to the story, but she decided to take care of this important task first. This would also be a great opportunity to make friends. "We can certainly help you on that. In fact, you have come to the right person. What you want to do is what I do in my everyday life. We can find all the right ways for you to pursue this dream," said Apple.

There was a pause.

"Really?" asked Rochelle.

"It's all true, and you'll see when I finish trying to arrange the tools for you. You see, we live more than the usual existence, and we think about things like this all the time. We also have some special friends whom I'll introduce you to gradually in due time. If this is your dream, you'll

fit right in" Apple said.

"Thank you, thank you," said Rochelle. "I was almost to afraid to say what I've just said, in case I may be considered a fool by some unfriendly types, and misunderstood by others. I wondered if you might be one of those who really thought about things rather than those who expect the usual and slam the rest, and I was right!"

"There are many out there who don't understand what life is, but it seems that you do, and I am happy to have met you," Apple said.

"By the way, it's time to see some of our friends. Are you ready to come along now?"

"Sure."

"Let's go," said Apple, looking at her watch.

So they boarded the bus together, which took them through the suburban streets around Southlands to the Apple Complex within ten minutes.

Apple knew that her friends were in already, so she pressed the doorbell and waited for a response. Normally she would always be the first to get there to open this door, but today,

knowing that she would be late, she entrusted the keys to Ralph. Monica greeted them at the door, and welcomed them in.

"Hi, you must be Rochelle, Apple's new friend," Monica said, trying to start the conversation.

"Yes," Rochelle said, a bit shyly.

"My name is Monica. Welcome to our afternoon gathering," Monica went on to say.

At this point they entered the area where the little happy group was gathering. They were more than ready to show a bit of team spirit.

"Hey, Rochelle, welcome to our gathering," most of them said something like this, although when the words were uttered they were not in sync, so it sounded more like a wave of unrecognisable voices.

Rochelle looked like she was in awe of the warm welcome she was receiving. She was actually quite happy too, and maybe a bit embarrassed. She smiled and her face reddened a bit, and she looked very lovely.

"Hi everybody. Thanks for the warm welcome," she said, managing to get the words audible above the voices.

I'm indeed proud of the culture here, Apple

thought.

"Hey Rochelle, my name is Cheryl and I am friends with Apple. Welcome to our gathering," Cheryl went over to introduce herself.

"Do you often have something like this on?" asked Rochelle.

"We do it once or twice every week," replied Cheryl. "We just sit around and talk about life."

"Hey there, what's up?" Ralph came behind Cheryl patting her on the shoulder.

"Have you talked to Rochelle yet?" asked Cheryl.

"Not yet," Ralph replied before quickly turning back to Rochelle. "Hi, my name is Ralph and I am another local here. Nice to meet you," he said.

"Nice to meet you," Rochelle replied nicely. and I frequently come to this place,"

Soon after, Rochelle was chatting to them like old friends. As usual, they went into the kitchen for snack time while they continued talking. For some reason, Rochelle seemed to be enjoying this a lot. Apple was a bit worried that the gathering may be too plain for Rochelle, but it

seemed that now she was feeling at home.

"Let's do something happy now. Who has been making the happy news this week?" asked Apple.

"I would have to say Royale Rolldon," Monica used the most stylish voice to say. "Her marriage was absolutely wonderful."

Apple didn't say anything. That marriage was all uncreative and about showing off bling, and would probably end in divorce in no time.

People in Eastlands have much more meaningful and much less wasteful commitment ceremonies than that, surely. And the ceremonies are more meaningful because the ones involved generally stay family forever. The others didn't seem to have much to say. Monica was a big Royale fan but to most of the others she was tolerable at best and arrogant and stupid at worst.

"Yes, it was a lucky thing for her. We should be happy for her," said Rochelle weakly, seemingly really feeling it for some reason.

"What about Daisy Dreams?" suggested Cheryl.

"She did her fans proud at the annual Big

Orange festival."

With this, Apple couldn't help turning her eyes to Rochelle for a moment. She saw Rochelle blushing a little. Maybe she was imagining it?

"Yes, good on her. She has always been one bright star in this world giving people hope and happiness, and the emotional support to live a good life. It is amazing that she can do this to even to people who don't really know her personally. This is something that I aspire for personally too," said Apple.

"We all know how much you like her," Monica said, "but for me she's just a little too simple." Apple shot Rochelle another look. She looked a bit uneasy, and looked as if she were about to speak.

"Sometimes people can't help in how they are seen, especially when they are in situations they can't control," Rochelle said.

Ralph looked to Apple as if he had something on his mind. Maybe he thought that there were other 'conspiracies' behind this girl's story?

Please, Ralph, don't think of her this way and spoil our good time here, she thought.

"What do you mean?" asked Monica.

"It's just that..... People may not really be what you see them as, especially if you don't know them personally and you are seeing them through distorted glasses," said Rochelle. Ralph was actually secretly despising Rochelle now. How could someone stand up for a superficial character like this, he thought. Apple tried to change the topic, seeing that there was potential for hurt now. "Onto the next piece of happy news, they are finally making a film on Miss Dora who stood up for peace three years ago....."

The party continued happily. Soon it was 5:30, the time for this gathering to end today.

"Will you come out with us on another gathering?" Apple offered.

"Yes, when can I come again?" asked Rochelle eagerly.

"If you can make it here at eight on Saturday morning, we will be going to some special place, and we'll have a whole day of fun," said Apple.

"Yes, I'm coming. But where's that place?" asked Rochelle.

"It's Eastlands. It'll be an eye-opening experience." said Apple. "See you then."

"See you, Apple. You have been a great friend," said Rochelle.

"You have been a great friend too. Take care," said Apple.

Saturday came. As she was getting ready for the day, Apple was feeling excited and satisfied. Today a friend would have her dreams realised. Apple was confident that all she could get her new friend in Eastlands would be more than enough to make her smile. If only the whole world were also like Eastlands, and everybody were as happy as us, she thought.

At two minutes to eight in the morning Rochelle rang the doorbell. Cheryl, who was already there because she spent the night before with Apple, answered the door. Ralph was there too - he had previously shied out of this with all sorts of excuses, but for some reason today he did indeed join the party, to the pleasant surprise of

Apple.

"Good morning, nice to see you again!" Cheryl greeted Rochelle.

"Good morning. Nice to see you," said Rochelle as she walked in.

"Nice to see you again," Apple said.

"How's it going?" asked Ralph shyly, much too shy to be his usual self.

"Everything is fine," said Rochelle, as they walked back into the lounge room.

"We've had breakfast already, but we can always find some more for you," said Apple.

"Thanks, but I've had quite a lot already," said Rochelle.

"So are we ready to go?" asked Apple.

"Yes," all three said.

"So let's get our gear ready and we will head for the YYs," Apple said.

"What's the YYs? It sounds funny," asked Rochelle.

"It's just our local bus stop. Someone had painted some feet on the ground which look like a series of Y's," Apple explained.

Chapter 8 - Rochelle Wakes Up to her Dream

They talked all the way to the YY, where luckily a bus was just waiting for them at the stop. The gladly hopped onto the bus, which was half empty since it was quite a bit too early for most. When they arrived at the railway station, it was still the quiet morning, and this made the occasion seem special, as if they were here on a trip especially made for them. The Intercity Express was also nearly empty, which let Apple dream that she and her friends were on a private train.

On the train, the three talked and talked. Rochelle asked Apple some questions about Eastlands.

"What's this Eastlands place like?" she began.

"Well, it's fun, spontaneous and different, as you'll see in half an hour's time," said Apple.

"But how's it like? How's it different?" Rochelle continued.

"It's much nicer and freer in there. People get to really use their creative impulses since the

resources are abundant. There are places to get all your materials and do all your projects cheaply. We are also friendly - we really get to know each other, there's no pretense and we visit each others' places by the busload all the time. The people are just happy and spontaneous and creative."

Sounds quite nice and interesting, thought Rochelle.

However, she was also a little bit uncomfortable with this lovely vision. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she had memories of another life where she was a blond girl called Daisy. Everyone thought she was living some version of the life Apple was describing above, but in reality she was living a life controlled and engineered by dozens of people. Wouldn't it be better to just use a robot, she had thought numerous times in the past. Dissatisfaction of a life that was supposedly like this was the reason she had come here, so why was she being reminded of it again?

But she didn't really want to change everything about her life, she just wanted a more 'real'

version of it. That's why out of all the things she could have wanted to do she most wanted to do a concert without needing to be fake – this would surely compensate her discomfort at having to do concerts as a fake persona so many times. And Miss Apple had just promised her the possibility of that! She told herself that this was another world, and that world of the headquarters of Maba Inc. and the headquarters of the Usall Group was far away. Nobody's telling Miss Apple to fake it, like she had to in front of her fans for so long. It was all spontaneous here.

"Do you go to this place a lot?" Rochelle asked. "Well, let me explain. I am actually a native of Eastlands, who grew up there and still live there half the time. I also live half my life in Saunivdow now just because I go to college there," said Apple. "Saunivdow's fun in its own ways, but I still prefer Eastlands."

Before they knew it, they were in Eastlands. The three of them got off the train to be greeted by a bunch of people on the platforms.

"Hey Apple," they shouted.

"Hey everybody," Apple returned the greeting.

"Have a nice day," she said, as they left the area.

They exited the station, and met a few larger groups of people just outside the paid area, who were talking happily. Some were waving and screaming as they saw the three coming through the gates.

"Apple, can I come today?" asked one representative who came out.

"Well, I'm not doing my show and party today, but you can come to our little gathering if you want to," said Apple.

Cheryl gave her a nudge, which most likely stood for 'Isn't it that I'm running a tour today?'

"We're taking my special friend Rochelle on a tour of the best places here today, and my other friend Cheryl is going to be the expert tour guide with the outsider's perspective," explained Apple.

"That sounds fun too. I'm coming," the rep said. With that quite a few of the groups cluttered around the three.

"Are you still doing autographs today?" asked a

few.

"When we get to my place," Apple promised them.

Inside Daisy's mind, she was seeing something like what she had in her other life, the life that she was going to have to return to on Monday. People crowded around her and asked for these things. Except none of this was orchestrated or overseen by Maba Inc. or the Usall Group. Except Apple was happy here, actually happy, there was none of that fake smile she was asked to put on. People asked for these things, but so many of them asked for it that there was no time to provide it for them all, and all the time the pressure would build up. Plus she couldn't really make friends with any of them directly, she couldn't speak her mind to them at all, let alone invite them home. Seeing what was happening here was both sad and hopeful. Sad because it reminded her of the life she didn't like, but hopeful since Apple was happy and had a lot of friends and maybe she could too.

"Looks like we'll need a bus. Maybe I should

make a special booking now. Come with me, people," Apple motioned.

They headed off through the bus stands to the booking office, where Apple said a few things. "It's all done," she said, motioning the crowd to follow her onto their next stop.

A four minute walk took them to the bus stands which faced the water, and they settled down in stand 23 as instructed on the booking sheet. "I'm here again," thought Cheryl. "I really like this place."

"Are you booking a bus to take the people somewhere?" Daisy asked.

"Yes," Apple said. "You see, this is one of the things that are common in Eastlands but not elsewhere."

"Where are we going then," asked Daisy.

"Just to my place. They are going there to get some goodies from me," Apple said.

"What goodies?" Daisy asked.

"Autographs, my latest creations, and the like," explained Apple. "See, we do this a lot here. The people in the other stands are probably just doing the same," she said as she pointed a finger in the direction of stand 22.

"You seem to be really popular in here," said Daisy.

"Everyone's a star here. That's part of the reason why it's fun. People visit your place, make friends with you and look at your stuff, and you make a lot of friends, visit a lot of places, and see a lot of stuff that's made by people who you know or at least could talk to them about," explained Apple.

I wished my other life was a bit more like this, thought Daisy.

A bus arrived, and people began to step onto it. It was just like a public bus, where people paid their fare as they got on. No wonder Apple didn't have to pay anything to get it here in the first place, thought Daisy.

"The fare's \$1.2 but I will pay it for you," said Apple as they were about to get onboard. It ain't expensive either, thought Daisy.

On the bus Apple sat between Cheryl and Daisy, who sat next to a window.

"The houses here are beautiful," said Daisy to Apple. "And they look so special - each one of them."

"I'm glad you're happy," said Apple. "It's not that far from my place now. Tell me if you like it when you see it."

Another five minutes later the bus stopped outside Apple's place.

"It's beautiful," said Daisy.

"We all had a say in its design, and we change the decoration from time to time. This season's decoration is the Grand Palace," Apple told Daisy, as they were about to step onto the driveway.

Like every other time, the crowd lined up orderly and entered the house in order. Cheryl was now used to this, but Daisy look astonished. Following Apple, they headed for that room in the basement.

The first thing Apple did for the crowd in the basement room was to sign their autographs. This somehow upsetted Daisy, and Apple noticed this when her eyes met those of the girl she thought was Rochelle for one moment. Other than that, everyone else seemed to be happy.

"I'm actually going to be taking a friend on a

tour of this place and help get her some goodies today," Apple announced when it was finally all over. "Any of you want to join me?" A sea of hands went up the air. Apple seemed pleased. So did Daisy.

"Come to the front door with me, everyone. We'll call the bus back and we'll head for the city," she said, and then did a few clicks on the computer.

With that, she led the crowd back out the door, where they gathered and chatted while they waited for the bus. A blue and green bus arrived on the scene five minutes later, which took most of the crowd away.

On the bus some of today's Apple 's Marching Band tried to mix with Daisy.

"Hey, what's your name," asked a friendly boy.

"I'm Rochelle," Daisy answered, remembering that she was still in disguise.

"I'm Taboe," he said.

"Nice to meet you, Taboe," said Daisy.

"Hi, Rochelle," a girl said, "nice to meet you. My name is Jewelle by the way."

"Nice to meet you Jewelle," said Daisy.

"Where do you come from?" asked Jewelle.

"I'm from Saunivdow," said Daisy.

"Saunivdow is the closest major city from here, yet sadly people from there don't often come here," said Jewelle.

"Yes, I only knew about it when Apple told me," said Daisy. "But it sounds like an interesting place with interesting things to do."

"What do you like to do in your own life?" ask Jewelle.

"I like to chat, make friends, be happy," said Daisy.

"Is there anything that you like to do as activities?" asked Jewelle.

"I like to think about things, talk to people about them, and express them in creative ways," said Daisy.

"That's what I like to do too, and I think here is a good place for people like us. I hope you'll enjoy what you see here," said Jewelle.

Soon they were back at the city bus stop, where they got off and formed a marching band behind Apple. Apple decided to go to the town square first, which would be a fit introduction to the city. It was a pretty place

and it represented the Eastlands philosophy to life.

The town square looked like a mixture of a pretty garden with places to sit, a high tech corner with digital information panels and internet hotspots, and a stage for concerts. People were sitting and chatting, and somebody was setting up the stage. Some were just having a snack or having a chat with their friends whilst they soak up the atmosphere around them, bustling yet happy and worry free. Some other people were using their digital devices to look up various things. Near the stage sat another marching band, where some people were helping out with setting up the stage and others were just chatting excitedly. "This is the place where we hang out with our friends, or just sit to relax by ourselves. The people come here to feel both just active and relaxed," said Apple. "And it's an internet hotspot too. We love our hotspots - it's part of our spontaneous way of life. It's very affordable too since everyone uses it. It's such a good feeling to be able to get the latest info and

maybe post to your website in this great atmosphere."

"I love this place," said Daisy.

They walked up to the people around the stage. They turned out to be a marching band, similar to Apple's. "Hey Charlie," Apple said. "Hey, my big sweet Apple, how's it going?" Charlie replied.

"I'm just bringing a couple of friends from outside to have a look around here, and to fulfill some dreams they have," said Apple.

"Wow, good on you for promoting this place! The tourism beaureau will really love you now," said Charlie. "Anyway, my friends are here because I'm putting on a show in about half an hours' time. It's just the usual comedy stuff."

"You've got something new again, that's great! Unfortunately, I can't come because these people I'm taking are in a hurry. Best of luck for the show anyway," said Apple.

"Rochelle, this is Charlie," Apple said to Daisy, who was just coming up. "Charlie, this is Rochelle."

"Nice to meet you Charlie."

"Nice to meet you, Rochelle. Where are you from?" asked Charlie.

"I'm from Saunivdow," she replied. "It's my first time here, and Miss Apple is taking me around. I have really enjoyed it so far. What are you doing here?"

"I'm setting up my show. I am a comedian, you see," said Charlie.

While this was happening, the two marching bands merged and there was loud chatter. By the time Apple and Daisy were ready to move on, the two marching bands had swapped over some members, with Apple's getting bigger, mainly because an outsider being taken around the city seemed quite a spectacle to many of them.

"Let's go and make your dreams come true now," said Apple. "We're heading to the Goodies Central," she told the crowd. "If there's something that I take for granted and don't explain well, maybe you can help a little?"

Apple asked Cheryl.

"I'll try my best," said Cheryl.

Five minutes later they were in Goodies Central.

It was like the super store that sold everything Cheryl had seen last time, only that it was much larger.

"Later today you will be doing your show at the studio. but first we need raw materials. This is where we pick our raw materials. Just browse, get what you like, and we'll meet out here in about half an hour. Does this sound well?" said Apple.

"Yes, that'll be fine," said Daisy.

"Do you want Cheryl to come with you? she can explain some things?"

"No thanks. I think I'll know what to do," said Daisy.

Fifteen minutes later, she came out with a large bag of goodies.

"You're all ready?" asked Apple.

"Yes, all ready and all satisfied," answered Daisy.

With that they headed to the studio. In five minutes they were in front of a big, imposing silver building.

"We will book the stage for your personalised concert very soon, but here's a place for you to

prepare some stuff for it. This is the Grand Studio, the biggest of its kind in this place. It is where people make their dreams come true in art forms. You can do whatever you like," explained Apple, as they entered the foyer. "What would you like to start with?" "Eh.... I'm not sure," said Daisy. "Is this studio expensive or controlled by any company?" "No, it is a public service run by the decent people of Eastlands, with an affordable price tag. You can record entire movies here for a few hundred dollars, though not at Hollywood quality. But that doesn't matter, really." "Maybe I'll make a video to start with?," said Daisy. "I'll go and make the booking, wait here for me," said Apple.

When Apple returned she had a key with her. She motioned the people to walk across a corridor. The corridor had doors on both sides, and they walked along until they reached room 326, where Apple opened the door. They entered the room, only to be faced with two further doors. The left one had 'studio' labelled

on it, and the right one said 'audience'. Apple opened the left door, and showed Daisy the way in. "Go in here, and you'll find out what to do next. Good luck," she said. Then the crowd walked through the other door.

The crowd cheered as they saw Daisy do her thing. The theme she chose was 'A Great Life Full Stop', which was just all about how we can all look through the clutter and try and live a happy life away from the false standards of others. The people of Eastlands already know this theme very well, but they still enjoyed the spontaneous and hilarious ways of Daisy. Later at dinner, they congratulated her on how well she did. "She's really a veteran," one claimed. "It all seems like the professional stuff from out there," another one said, "which has its good and bad, but it was really good still." Daisy seemed like she was in heaven. To her, the best thing about this was that everyone treated her as a friend, a valuable individual. Here, she did not feel like an exhibit. Maybe such a moment would even be able to sustain her next time she was subjected to the inhuman interrogation by

those in the outside world, she thought.

When the crowd went home, Daisy told Apple about the truth.

"So you are Daisy Dreams? How come you got here?" asked Apple.

"Well... I found that I didn't really like what I was doing, so I took some time in my break off to do some other things. And it turned out to be so good!"

"So what do you want to do now?" asked Apple.

"Well... more of this, I suppose. Can you help me?"

Chapter 9 - Let's Start A Campaign

"I have something in store for you. Check your email in a few days," said Apple.

"Really? Thanks!" said Daisy. Then she looked at her watch. "Oh, I have to leave now, anyway, thanks for making it all come true."

"Daisy, I'm happy that you have your dreams

fulfilled finally," said Apple. "You know, you are always welcome to come back here and do some more of this. With your great talent, you can do anything you want."

"Apple, thanks for your help," said Daisy.

"If there anything more that's troubling you, you can just ask any of us. Remember, we Eastlanders are dreammakers and will always be there for the heart which dreams," said Apple.

"Actually, is there a way to take what I've done to the next level?" asked Daisy.

"What do you want then?" asked Apple.

"Well, to make this exercise fruitful. To let what I've done really touch the people who need it," said Daisy.

"Well, it's not hard if you're talking about a place like Eastlands. In fact, I will feature what you have done in my own show when I have a slot, and later on, if you like to, you can start your own shows and production series. It's also not hard to get audience in Eastlands," said Apple.

"But I live in the world out there, where I won't see a difference," said Daisy.

Apple thought for a while. It's not easy, she

thought, in such an indifferent world. They would surely know the happiness this sort of thing can bring when they experience it, but before that has a chance to happen a majority of people will still prefer the empty, often painful 'entertainment' on offer out there. But this is Daisy, one of the ten most popular kids out there, she thought.

"If you want to play this game in the world out there, you will have to have the tools, which are not very accessible unfortunately. We're working to change that but I suppose you don't want to have to wait? But remember that you have an advantage - you have the access to the gamepieces of the game out there. You are in the top 10, remember?" suggested Apple.

"Yes, but they dictate what I have to do," said Daisy.

"Then we'll have to convince them, that there's this big new thing out there called... whatever, and it will be big and popular, and you want to be the icon for it. Once we've opened up the system, the freedom will be available to everyone at anytime, so we'll only have to do it

once," said Apple.

"But how are we going to do that," asked Daisy.

"We'll see. I'm a dreamer, remember? We'll make it," said Apple. "Just keep in contact with me and I'll sort things out."

After Daisy left, Apple started up her computer to check her mail. Konio was online and he wanted to talk. She decided to accept his invitation.

Konio: How's it going, sis?

Apple: I'm fine. How about you?

Konio: I'm okay. How about the project, have you got any ideas yet?

Apple had almost forgotten that she was supposed to find a solution for Konio's group. But no worries, she had one now.

Apple: I am figuring out a world changing plan with a friend. We'll work through some of the hottest avenues, so we'll have a great chance

of getting something done.

Konio: You talking about Hollywood?

Apple: That kind of thing.

Konio: Sure you're not bullshitting?

Apple: Why would I be?

Konio: Then maybe you should get yourself to our meeting at the Saunivdow Convention Centre on tomorrow evening. It shouldn't be hard, since Monday's a long weekend. And bring your friend too.

Apple thought about it. The Convention Centre? That shouldn't be bad. There was no way she was going up to Konio's place, so meeting him there won't be a bad idea if they were going to establish a partnership.

Apple: I'll try. I'll have to see if she can come.

Konio: Try your best. Come anyway even if she can't make it.

Apple: I will.

That finished the conversation, upon which Apple immediately went on to think about her next move. She would bring everyone who was

interested, since it would feel strange to bring Daisy only, both to Daisy and to her friends. To make it seem more like a great event, so that everyone will behave naturally, they'll have a great evening out first and then head to the Convention in style. This would make a great night.

With that sorted out, she went to pick up her phone to grab her list of people. She would also have to grab Daisy by phone now that it was happening so quickly.

Apple, Ralph, Cheryl, the rest of her Apple Complex companions, and Daisy met up at the foyer of the Convention Centre at 6pm. They then entered the function room they were told to go to. Upon arriving they were ushered by the guards into a special meeting room. There, a slightly chubby young man, and an older, thinner middle aged lady were sitting there, waiting for them.

"Hey, everybody. I'm Konio from the chat," the

young man said.

"Hey Konio," said Apple, "I'm Apple and these are my friends. By the way they don't know much of the story, so I think we should start from the beginning."

"Just so that I am introduced, my name is Noraet," the middle aged lady said. "I am a representative from the SMILE group, which Konio is a junior member of. By the way, we are sorry for Konio's pranks - we have told him not to do it again, and good on you Miss Apple for stopping it."

Apple felt a bit uneasy at that. Konio had always known her as Apple, so how come this woman knew her name. "How come you know my name," she asked, deciding that she really needed to ask.

"I know everything about you my dear," said Noraet. "You are the princess of Eastlands. I should probably explain this. We, the SMILE group, originally came together to invent the concept of a town happy people could live in away from the troubles that were real life, a concept we called Primitown. We envisioned a place where we would all have great families

that never let each other down, and life would be about creating and sharing great moments and making friends with each other over such moments rather than focusing on the petty annoyances that were everywhere. We did our experiment in the small, previously almost uninhabited by people, town of Eastlands, and invited people who had the same dream to live there.

Your social grandparents, the Narvilles, were very brave people. They were the first founders of the town, and one of them was the first president of the SMILE. Meanwhile, other people in the organisation chose to live outside there, just to monitor how well it was doing compared to the outside world in case things needed changing, and perhaps participate in the education of outsiders. Which is what we are here for.

The Nevilles ended up having no biological children, so now you are the heir. What better people than the heir to the development of our new lifestyle, and the popular teen queen who

has recognised that there is a better way to life and is ready to tell her millions of friends?"

Apple was almost shocked to hear this. Certainly, nobody had told her anything about the history of her family and her hometown? Everybody just assumed that Eastlands always existed, and had a sister city called Primitown. But Eastlands was a place where nobility didn't matter and history was about the substance and ideas and not the form, so maybe people don't care to mention these things. They all sat down, and everything that had happened between Apple and Konio was explained, including the plan they were going to go ahead with.

"It's your idea to begin with, and maybe you will do it better than me. Maybe I should just tell everyone that I had a great group of friends who helped me discover myself and become a more real human being," suggested Daisy. "You can do what you like, but Daisy, you are as important as anyone of us in reaching this point, and we are in this together," Apple

reminded her. "We are not using you as a messenger here."

"Yes, we need more brains," Konio chimed in, "and we can't really afford to miss the smart Daisy Dreams!"

"Thanks for inviting me," said Daisy. "But all I was saying was that I'm not that good at putting the campaign together. I'll do all the styling and packaging work, they say I'm good at that."

"That's fine," said Apple, giving her a hug.

They went on to talk about how people could be motivated to hope for something better.

"We need something that will impact," Apple carried on. "Something people can really feel and identify with in their lives."

"How about your own story," asked Konio.

"Wasn't that the thing which started all this?"

Daisy thought for a while.

"Sure, my story could be a touching one to some minds, but it is not one everyone would understand. To most people out there, red carpets stars evolve all the time, and the fact that I fought and won the right to be a truer self is a narrative too similar to many stories out

there. Remember that they can't see the whole story behind it," Daisy reasoned.

"How about you, Miss Apple," asked Kevin.

"You're a big dreamer, aren't you? I remember how you told me a boring bus trip can be like a faraway holiday to you."

"Yes, that's the content, but people want to see results first," Apple said.

"You live in quite a good place where you have heaps of people who like you, you do your own thing, and you seem like a really happy girl,"

Kevin suggested. "Yes, come on, you can do it!"

"Well, I don't live in a gloom place like the people out there. Things are different in Eastlands...." said Apple.

"Eastlands! That's it! That's where my dreams came true!" Daisy exclaimed happily.

"How can it help?" Ask Konio.

"It just goes to show how good life can be. I mean, they are not especially rich or have heaps of extra time, but they can live their dreams fairly easily," Daisy said.

"But the outside people don't have that community," Konio said.

"We can build it," said Daisy. "It's not hard, is it?"

"It's a bit late and we have to go off now," said Noraet. "But we can always continue tomorrow. I believe we have come off to a good start."

The next day she went and told her Eastlands friends about everything.

"So you really ARE the Princess of our lovely Eastlands," one of them said.

"I guess so then."

"Let's salute our princess."

"No, let me salute you first. You are all Princesses and Princes of many things that are much more important to humanity."

Chapter 10. If Only There were More Invitations

So Eastlands Culture, the culture that Apple was heir to, the culture that she had grown up with and took almost for granted, was so helpful to even such a prominent person from the 'outside world'. It was a big thing for her to grasp, at least immediately. But she knew that

she was a lucky person – she had access to something that millions just didn't, and they are not living to their full potential because of this.

A thought struck Apple's mind. More people need to be 'saved', like 'Rochelle'. More people need to experience how a more liberated life feels like. With that in mind, she flew across to her workshop and began drawing up plans to get her friends to look out for potential people to help from the outside world...

And that was where the operation to cheer up hundreds of people by exposing them to a brand new way of living began.

And you may be next.